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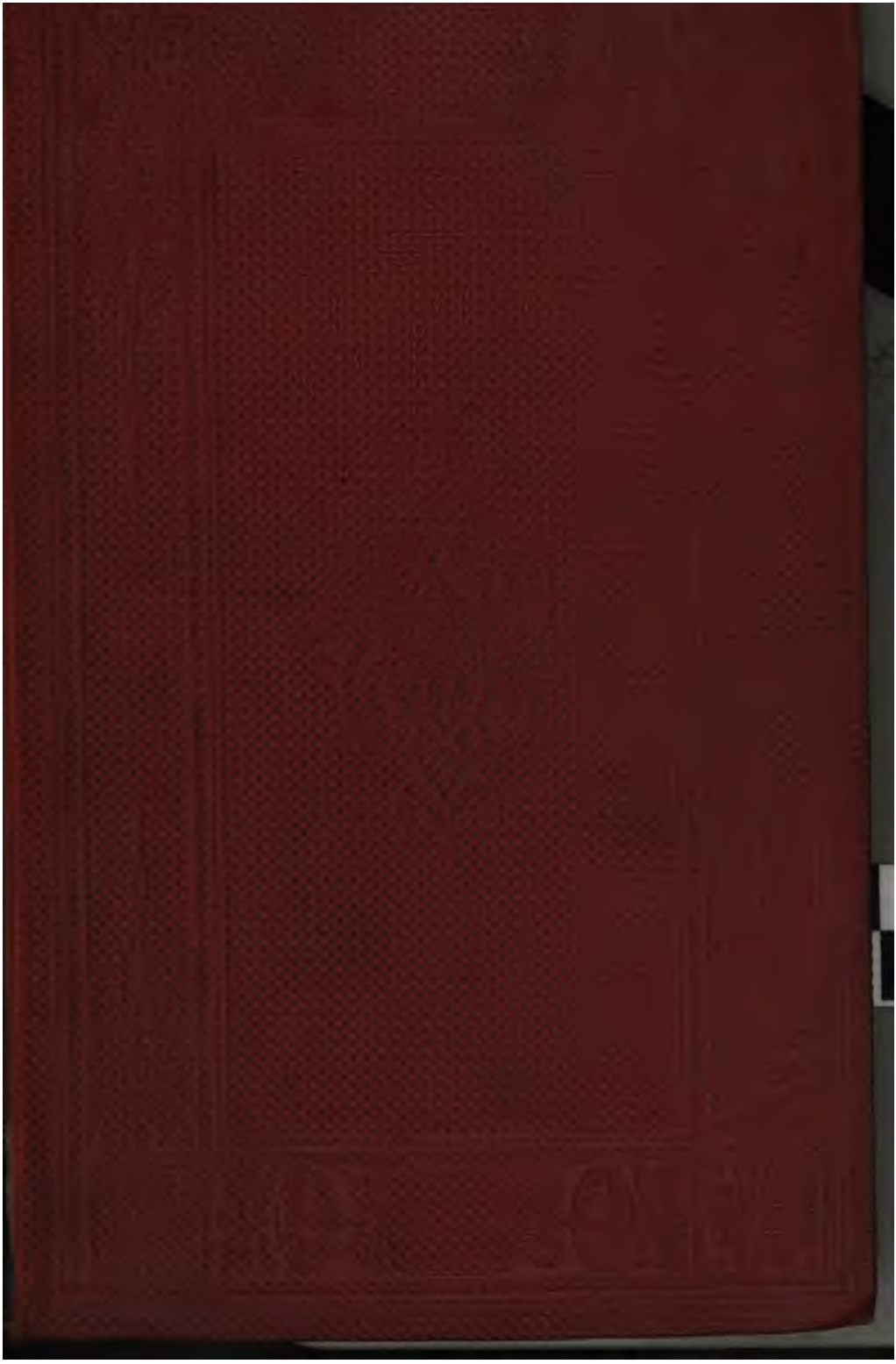

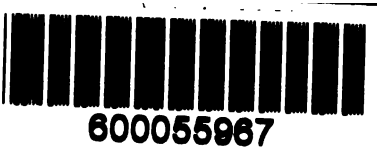
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# *CHARLEY NUGENT;*

or,

## Paſſages in the Life of a Sub.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# CHARLEY NUGENT.

## CHAPTER I.

### GARRISON THEATRICALS.

About this time I received a mandate from my respected governor, to the effect that my cousin Harry Leicester had exchanged into the 21st Hussars, stationed at Dublin, and that it would be desirable for me to look him up and cultivate his acquaintance. I had never seen the young gentleman in question since he was quite a juvenile; when I, younger still, used to stand aghast at his mad freaks, and felt my blood run cold as he detailed the tricks and escapades of a large public school, into which he had been initiated at an age when most boys are still in petticoats.

My father and mother had a wholesome dread of similar performances in their own family. Tom at an alarmingly early age began to exhibit unmistakable evidence of the talent for candid observations that soon caused him to be regarded as the "*enfant terrible*" of the neighbourhood; and to have had an obstreperous and rebellious son into the bargain, would have

been quite too much for mortal parents. So Harry Leicester was not much cultivated at Langley Park. He had been expelled from one school, and he ran away from another; entered at Oxford, he was compelled to leave it in order to avoid an enforced dismissal; and at last in utter and sheer despair his father bought him a commission in the cavalry, settled an allowance upon him, and told him that if he got into debt or into any more scrapes he might go to the devil his own way, he washed his hands of him entirely.

His regiment was in India, and thither he went, and had only been a few months in the country when they were led into action against some native tribes who had revolted. During a very hot engagement Harry contrived to distinguish himself greatly, and was especially mentioned in the despatch as a very promising young officer. A cessation of hostilities enabled Harry (who detested India) to effect an exchange and return to his own country; he had now joined the 21st Hussars, one of the finest corps in the service, and particularly noted for the extravagance of its appointments in everything relating to regimental expenditure.

The colonel was a man of noble family, many of the officers very highly connected, and most of them rich; indeed Colonel Fitzneville discouraged all but wealthy men from entering his regiment.

"Let poor devils stick to the Line, we don't want them here," he remarked, with all the arrogance of a full-blown cavalry officer; and "poor devils" were not welcomed accordingly.

The mess was on a scale of luxury and magnificence only fitted for a royal palace, the band was the finest in the service, and both the head cook and the band-

master drove stylish dog-carts, wore pale kid gloves, and received salaries of many hundreds a year.

One thing Colonel the Honourable Neville Fitzneville greatly abhorred, and that was poverty; people had no business to be poor, and if they were so, and couldn't help it, they had no business to enter the 21st Hussars, and so he very soon proved to them; but there was another thing he still more decidedly repudiated, and that was matrimony. A single man himself, and likely to remain so, he abetted celibacy as firmly as if he had been Abbot of a monastery of Cisterian Monks, and denounced matrimony long and loudly on every occasion.

Woe betide the unhappy cornet convicted of a sneaking partiality for some fair specimen of book-muslin and long flowing ringlets; it was all over with his peace of mind, at mess at any rate; he was roasted within an inch of his life, chaffed on every possible occasion, and it must indeed have been a very deeply-seated passion that survived such a course of treatment. From this little description it may be supposed that there were not many so-called "ladies' men" in the 21st Hussars; they visited very little in a general way, and like another famous cavalry corps, "didn't dance;" at very few balls were their gay and glittering uniforms to be distinguished, and when they did so honour any "réunion" of the fashionable world, it was only to lounge in indolent attitudes against the door-posts, twirling their heavy moustaches, and staring in an easy scrutinising manner at every girl that passed them, occasionally varying the entertainment by yawning wearily, and glancing at each other in a manner meant to express, "By Jove! aw—what an aw—infernal bore aw—this is!"

Now for my visit to Harry Leicester. The cavalry barracks were about a mile from ours, so I rode up; and on inquiry I found that Mr. Leicester had not yet returned from a parade in the "Phœnix," but would be back in a few minutes.

I thought I might as well wait, as I wished to see him; so dismounting and giving my horse to a soldier, I entered the mess-room, where I found several officers, one or two of whom were known to me. We chatted until, in about ten minutes, the trampling of horses and clank, clank of their paraphernalia, announced the return of the troop to which my cousin belonged; and in about a minute more he came into the room, having been told I was there.

We shook hands cordially.

He was a very handsome fellow, fully six feet in height and proportionably muscular; with a fine open brow, a pair of dark glancing eyes, and I must own a strong dash of the "dare devil" in his general appearance and manner. We fraternized at once, and I felt sure I should like him.

"Come up to my room," he said, "till I get rid of this confounded toggery and don mufti; no comfort as long as one is in harness."

I followed him to a very comfortable apartment, snugly furnished in bachelor style; two or three luxurious armchairs stood about, and the walls were decorated with a very choice collection of racing and hunting prints, intermixed with portraits of several "pets" of the ballet in scanty drapery and fatiguing attitudes.

"Jackson," he said to his servant, "fetch some sherry and biscuits, and a couple of bottles of pale ale. Sharp's the word now, I'm blind and choked with

dust. I'll speak to you presently, Nugent; just let me get out of this. All right now; have a weed? The sherry will be here immediately, and then we'll set to and do a deal of talking."

I lighted a cigar, Leicester did the same, having previously imbibed a liberal allowance of Bass; and we mutually asked and answered questions relative to our respective proceedings since our last meeting in the days of pinafores and rocking-horses.

"What ages it seems since then," remarked Leicester, "and yet how well I recollect it all. Catching Annie's pet kitten in a trap, when it got off with the loss of its tail; and how poor Annie cried and lamented over the ugly little brute, and went mooning about with the bit of tail as if it had been the finest brush of the season! And now Annie is a staid married lady, a parson's wife, and, by Jove! a very pretty girl; you know I called on them when I was in town?"

"Yes, Annie told me she had seen you," I replied, laughing.

"I know what you are laughing at," he said, following my example, "it is about that blessed baby of her's, and a very fine little fellow he is; but I believe Annie has never forgotten the kitten, and was in agonies lest something of the same kind should happen with her son and heir. I know quite well that there is nothing children like half so much as being tossed into the air and caught again; so of course I began it with little Arthur, who shouted and yelled with delight; but poor Annie got as pale as a sheet, and carried off her darling, though he was in frantic grief at having his game stopped. I am sure she was thinking of the kitten."

"Very likely," I replied, "first babies are precious

things. But Harry, I want to hear more about yourself. Do you like the 21st?"

"As far as I have seen, very much. They are a set of very good fellows on the whole; Colonel Fitzneville is a bit of a bashaw, but pleasant enough when nothing crosses him. The mess is splendid; I hope you will come and judge of that yourself. Can you dine with me to-morrow? It is a guest night, and the colonel has some swells coming, so everything will be in tip-top style."

"I shall be very happy," I replied: "and I hope you will dine with us to-day. Two of your people are coming, friends of Captain Etherege."

"All right. I'm quite at your service. Never met any of your fellows, but I believe you are amazingly popular; I hear of the 144th at every corner. You have a good band, too, but we'll beat you there."

"Perhaps so; but we don't pay quite what you do for keeping it up."

"Don't speak of that! It's a regular extortion. But what can one do? The colonel will have it A 1, and in that case it follows that our pockets must bleed for it. But I grumble at nothing now, I am so thankful at getting back to a Christian country. How long will it be till your bad star carries you 'Eastward Ho?'"

"Oh, some years, I believe, unless anything particular occurs. But I can't understand your hating India so much; I thought it was rather a jolly place, heaps of fun, and then double pay."

"Double pay, indeed! Much good that does you when you have to give about six times as much for everything as you do in this country. You soon find to your cost whether it is cheaper or not. Oh Lord!

the vile place; I creep when I think of it. The heat we'll not mention, though I don't believe the lower regions can be much worse; fancy living in the hottest forcing-house you ever were in, and you'll have a mild notion of it. Then the horrid, parched, baking ground, that seemed to crack as you walked on it; not a drop of moisture to lay the dust for months. One day there came a shower, and it's a positive fact I went across the road to have the unspeakable pleasure of walking through a puddle; I quite enjoyed it, and splashed about like children in a gutter."

"Come, Harry!" I exclaimed, "this is too strong; you are dealing in travellers' tales now!"

"Not a bit of it," he replied; "ask any man who has been out, and he'll tell you the same. Fancy pulling on your boot in a hurry, feeling something in it, dashing it off instantly, when out jumps a fine lively centipede. Nice, eh? Or you want to know what o'clock it is, and put your hand under the pillow to get at your watch. A cold, slimy thing touches you; you bolt out of bed, and away wriggles a charming specimen of a particularly deadly snake. *Very* jolly that! Well, these agreeable little incidents occur every day."

I laughed at the air of extreme disgust with which Leicester knocked the ashes off the end of his cigar, and then thrust himself into an easier position in his low rocking-chair.

"Ah! these things do very well to laugh at now, when you have got rid of the cursed annoyance; but by Jove! they are no grinning matter at the time. Of course it is not quite so bad in Calcutta, or a few of the large stations; but I am speaking of outlandish

stations, like the one where we were located; some five hundred miles beyond the end of the world, where your correspondents might be dead, buried, and embalmed, before you received their letters; and all newspapers were of an antiquity frightful to witness —Queen Anne's death quite a recent piece of intelligence. Don't you be longing for a shake at the pagoda-tree, Charley, my boy; it's a hideous delusion, a popular error. I can tell you this child had enough of these diggings."

More conversation of a similar nature followed, and then I departed, very much pleased with my cousin Harry Leicester, with whom I soon became on terms of the most friendly intimacy.

It was impossible to resist the contagion of his frank, hearty laugh; his beaming countenance was a welcome sight at all times and seasons; and through him we soon became well acquainted with the 21st, and connected with a good many of their schemes for mischief and amusement.

There was a great talk about raising funds for some local military charity at this time; and a proposition was made, and unanimously adopted, that we should combine our united genius and talents, and get up an amateur play, the profits to be devoted to the purposes of the charity.

It was after mess one evening when several of us had been dining with the Hussars, that the subject was more especially discussed; and after an immense number of plays had been duly considered and rejected, the comedy of the "Rivals" was finally selected. It was not tremendously difficult, there were no very long speeches to be learnt by heart, and there were a good many characters all pretty much on a par—a

great consideration when a number of people wish to act, and are all ambitious of rather prominent positions. By universal consent the part of Captain Absolute was awarded to Harry Leicester. Then Barry was naturally peculiarly adapted for the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, as his fine broad brogue was indispensable; but on mature reflection we all agreed that only he could do justice to the charming *rôle* of Mrs. Malaprop, so Sir Lucius was entrusted to the tender mercies of Captain Moore, another member of the "Brigade."

We had also agreed that we were to "do" the ladies ourselves, and be indebted to no extraneous assistance for the glory with which we were resolved to cover ourselves.

But now came the rub.

Who amongst us all was most likely to produce an effect as Miss Lydia Languish; or who was the least likely to create a roar of laughter on his first appearance in this peculiarly unmasculine character?

A glance round the table at the massive forms and fierce moustaches of the gallant hussars settled their share in the transaction without the delay of a moment.

"De Vere, De Vere!" sang out a chorus of voices; "he's the man."

"Oh! really, now," began De Vere, but he was instantly stopped by Captain Etherege, who had undertaken the duties of stage-manager, and general director.

"Not a word, my dear fellow, you'll do it to admiration; in fact you're the very man."

"Pon my honour, the thing is impossible," said De Vere; "I haven't the nerve of a cat."

"Better and better," replied Etherege; "the more

nervous and timid you are the better you will look the character."

"Get into women's clothes!" exclaimed the other. "Why, how do you expect me to walk? I'll fall down at the first step."

"All right, then we'll pick you up again. People will think it part of the performance."

"I remember acting once in some Christmas tableaux," remarked a good-looking hussar of the name of Bolton, "and the awful fright I was in when I found myself in front of the audience. I was well up in my part, and thought I should get on like a house on fire; instead of which I forgot every word of it, and felt the whole floor yawning before me. I had to sing 'Still so gently o'er me stealing,' and managed to get through the first verse pretty tolerably, only breaking down about the end. The audience were very good-natured, and clapped and applauded me furiously; but all to no purpose, part, words, music had all clean fled from my memory. Just as I was going to turn, and make the best of my way behind the scenes, a bright idea darted into my head; and without the delay of an instant I dashed right into 'Willikins and his Dinah,' about the most unsuitable air that can be imagined for the scene then on. As I had only shown an instant of hesitation after the first verse, the audience never doubted that my nervousness was all for effect, and intended all along; so they considered this a splendid hit, and it told amazingly. Roars of laughter and immense applause rewarded the conclusion of my ditty; and by this time I had recovered my assurance, so I kept my own counsel and nobody was any the wiser; everybody fancied it just a private little freak of my own, and I came off with flying colours."

"I'll profit by your hint, Bolton," said De Vere; "and whenever I feel it is all up with me, I'll fall flat on the ground. You will understand I have fainted, and get me some brandy on the spot."

"Bolton, you are to be Falkland," said Captain Etherege; "and now for Julia. Who comes next to De Vere in lady-like deportment?"

A lately joined cornet was seized on; a slim, dark youth, who was only reconciled to the loss of a sedulously cherished moustache by being informed that his white hands and small feet were not to be equalled in the corps, and that it was impossible to send a Julia before the world with fists requiring gloves of at least No. 10 to make them at all respectable.

Major Lumley, of the 21st, was cast for Sir Anthony Absolute; Lacy, of "ours," for Bob Acres; Lucy, the sly little soubrette, was entrusted to my care; and the remaining subordinate characters were filled without difficulty. We wrote for acting copies of the play, fixed an early evening for our first rehearsal, and all set to most diligently to learn our parts. Barry insisted on practising the Malaprop style of mispronunciation at all hours and on all occasions; and he did it admirably, only it became very fatiguing at last, partly, to be sure, on account of our always being compelled to laugh at his absurd interpolations. Lacy was equally ridiculous with his oaths *à la* Bob Acres, and we all caught the infection and followed his example; it was a very merry time, and we looked forward with great eagerness to the time of our public exhibition; an event in which all our Dublin friends were also very much interested.

Nothing could equal the fun of the rehearsals. It was in vain that Etherege called us to order; and

shouts of laughter occurred so incessantly, that an ignorant bystander would have been led to the conclusion that we had all inhaled a very considerable allowance of laughing-gas.

"For heaven's sake, De Vere, don't stride across the stage in that awful manner. Look here, I'll tie your legs together, it's the only way to teach you. Now try it; that's much better—capital."

"Somebody pick me up if I fall," said De Vere, plaintively, "and don't forget the brandy."

"Oh! we'll pick you up, never fear; but, my dear Miss Languish, you must not stand at ease in such an attitude as that. Sink the soldier for the present, and give over smoothing your moustaches; you won't have them when you act, to be sure; but you are sure to do something out of joint unless you are careful."

"I've forgotten every word of my part," said young Travers, who acted Julia; "it's such a bore learning it, and I forget it immediately."

"We'll prompt you," said Etherege, encouragingly; "Rome was not built in a day; you'll come to it all in time. Now, are you all ready? We are losing time sadly."

After repeated small trials, which put us all nearly up in our parts, we had a dress rehearsal, to which a few friends from both regiments were admitted.

It went off capitally, and gave us great confidence in our powers. Barry, as Mrs. Malaprop, displayed consummate skill in acting and "getting up;" his first appearance was greeted with an enthusiastic round of applause, to which he replied by a series of curtsies and sidelong bends of his head that excited fresh shouts of merriment. He certainly was the "star" of our company, but it is not often that "stars" are so

well supported; for I must really own that every one did their best, and a very well sustained set of characters was the result. De Vere looked quite charming as Lydia Languish, in a fashionably-made white muslin dress, trimmed with a quantity of very becoming pink ribbons, and the most exquisite little lace cap that ever was seen; Miss Languish was probably not quite so tall as my gallant brother sub, but otherwise the character was really very ably filled; and thanks to Etherege's hint about tying his legs, his gait was of an elegantly mincing description, and it was also impossible that he could sit cross-legged, which he had several times manifested a strong inclination to do.

Julia only required to be prompted occasionally, and did very well on the whole; her black velvet boddice and blue petticoat looked very nice indeed, and barring that the victimized cornet, once or twice, grew rather red in the face when his respiration was affected by the French corsets, into which he had been carefully inducted, he did not appear to be particularly uncomfortable. I do not think the fastidious Falkland would have entirely approved of the delicate aroma of tobacco that pervaded the person of his adored Julia; but as the young lady was smoking up to the last moment of her being wanted on the stage, this little peculiarity could scarcely be avoided. I was greatly complimented upon my performance of the part of Lucy; and Mrs. Grant had, herself, superintended my toilette, and had given me very rigid instructions on the subject of my speech and deportment.

Leicester was the very model of Jack Absolute, and he was quite at home in the character, having taken it once or twice before.

Lumley, Bolton, and Moore, were all perfect in their parts; and being now quite satisfied with our progress, we set to work to make the few final arrangements, and to fix the day for our public performance.

## GARRISON THEATRICALS.

## THEATRE ROYAL, DUBLIN.

On Tuesday Evening, the_____,

SHERIDAN'S COMEDY OF

# THE RIVALS

Will be performed by the Officers of the Garrison, for the Benefit of_____.

### THE RIVALS.

**Dramatis Personæ.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sir Anthony Absolute . | Major Lumley, 21st Hussars. |
| Captain Absolute . . . | Lieut. Leicester, 21st Hussars. |
| Falkland . . . . . | Hon. Capt. Bolton, 21st Hussars. |
| Acres . . . . . | Capt. Lacy, 144th Highlanders. |
| Sir Lucius O'Trigger . . | Capt. Moore, 144th Highlanders. |
| Fag . . . . . | Capt. Marsh, 144th Highlanders. |
| David . . . . . | Hon. Lieut. Cecil, 21st Hussars. |
| Coachman . . . . . | Cornet Wylde, 21st Hussars. |
| Mrs. Malaprop . . . . | Lieut. Barry, 144th Highlanders. |
| Lydia Languish . . . . | Lieut. de Vere, 144th Highlanders. |
| Julia . . . . . | Cornet Travers, 21st Hussars. |
| Lucy . . . . . | Lieut. Nugent, 144th Highlanders. |

*Stage Manager*—Captain Etherege, 144th Highlanders.

VIVAT REGINA.

The preceding is a specimen of the bills that were stuck up in every prominent situation all over Dublin; and soon the fame of our garrison theatricals spread far and wide.

Tickets for the boxes were a guinea each, for the pit half a guinea; but in spite of this rather extortionate price the demand for them was so enormous that only about one-third of the applicants could be gratified.

How important we all were, and what fun it was!

The eventful evening arrived at last.

Travers, of the 21st, declared that the part of Bob Acres should have been allotted to him, for he felt his courage rapidly oozing out of the palms of his hands, and he knew he should forget every word of his part; but the others were all pretty confident, and Etherege was a host in himself, he made such an admirable manager, and was in every place and corner at once; here insisting that Julia must have her corsets pulled tighter, or her jacket would not meet by at least a foot; then giving a deeper tinge of carmine to Mrs. Malaprop's rubicund visage, for which delicate attention that lady would make a curtsey that set us all off into convulsions; and finally sinking into a chair, half dead with fatigue, and indulging in an irresistible fit of laughter at the intensely absurd figures we all presented in this eleemosynary stage of our preparations.

But at last we were all ready, and the hour at hand.

The bands of the 21st and 144th were in attendance, and the former commenced by playing the splendid overture to "Guillaume Tell," in what Barry called "Telling style;" it certainly was a magnificent performance, and well merited the applause that greeted its conclusion. As the last chord was

struck the curtain drew up, and revealed a house crammed to the very ceiling with the *élite* of Dublin and its environs. We had beforehand made a number of tiny holes in the curtain for the purposes of inspection, and I must own it was a very gratifying sight that met our eyes; not a place remained unoccupied, and I do not remember on any other occasion ever to have seen so many beautiful women collected together. As a compliment to the performers, the entire garrison appeared in uniform; and the effect of the brilliant scarlet and gold trappings, the rich plaids and glancing brooches of the Highlanders, and the gorgeous paraphernalia of the Hussars, as contrasted with the white and rainbow-tinted dresses of the fair portion of the audience, was so dazzlingly brilliant and overpowering, that we all felt inspired with fresh ardour, and resolved to "do or die."

We made a most successful *début.*

The audience had come determined to be pleased, but indeed there was very little call for their indulgence. Barry, Leicester, and Major Lumley kept the house in a perpetual roar, and would have been reckoned capital performers on any stage, and Moore and De Vere were very little behind them; though, where all so thoroughly did their best, it is almost invidious to institute comparisons.

Loud and long were the plaudits on the conclusion of the play; the fair performers were deluged with bouquets, a large proportion of which were thrown at the admirable representative of Mrs. Malaprop, who curtseyed in a more charming manner at every fresh token of approval, and finally crossed her hands on her richly brocaded bosom, and making another bend still more profound than those that had gone

before, said, in a voice that produced one universal shout of laughter—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot sufficiently impress the feelings with which I am perpetrated by your amiable effulgence; but from the inmost excesses of my heart I thank you for your reprobation."

"Odds camellias and watering-pans!" said Acres, instantly following suit, as he picked up some of the bouquets and handed them to the lady, "I see acting is like fighting; it only wants a beginning."

"Sure, Mr. Acres," replied Mrs. Malaprop, as she gracefully received the bouquets, "that same is a most redoubted fact, and does not allow of inderdiction."

Fresh laughter followed their observations, and amid the clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs the curtain slowly descended, and "God save the Queen," played by both bands united, finally concluded this memorable performance.

## CHAPTER II.

### FLOGGING IN THE ARMY.

THE 144th were, generally speaking, a very well-conducted body of men; and it was very seldom that any extremely severe punishments were required in the regiment.

Colonel Grant held the reins of government firmly, but judiciously; he was no martinet, though remarkably strict in enforcing a due performance of their duties both from officers and men; neither was he one of those fidgety, crotchety commanders who are always prying into matters with which they have no particular concern, and worrying out grievances which principally exist in their own imagination. He was a man to be loved, but also to be respected and feared; therefore the regiment was in a state of excellent discipline, and Colonel Grant stood well at the Horse Guards, and was considered one of the steadiest and most judicious commanding officers in the entire British army.

But in a large body of men it cannot be expected that offences will never be committed; and though the 144th Highlanders had the best of reputations, and never left any place in which they were quartered

without the universal praises and regret of the inhabitants, yet disaffected spirits will sometimes be found in the steadiest corps, and a very strong and decided hand be required to put them down.

Colonel Grant discouraged drinking in every possible form; he truly said that from a love of ardent spirits sprang more than two-thirds of the crimes committed in the United Kingdom; and he considered that when a soldier was once thoroughly imbued with a passion for strong drink, no further good could be expected of him.

He himself set an example of the most perfect sobriety, and his strictness in that respect gave a tone to the regiment; there was very little, if any, hard drinking.

It had not been always so. The previous colonel was a man of a very different stamp; a brave soldier and pleasant companion, he was wholly wanting in the qualities that alone constitute a good commanding officer. Easy and good-natured, he winked at much that was decidedly wrong; and his own peculiarly convivial disposition deterred him from pronouncing a harsh verdict on those whose tendencies led them in the same direction; so that while he was at the head of the regiment, drunkenness was a fault of incessant occurrence, and soldiers in a disgusting state of intoxication might be met at almost every hour; the corps was rapidly deteriorating into one of the worst in the service.

The detention of an hour or two in the Black-hole was the invariable punishment, in fact, it was scarcely regarded as any punishment at all; but how could the colonel consistently inflict a severe penalty on the men, when the officers were very little, if at all, better;

filling the barracks every night with the most uproarious revelry, and being constantly carried to their rooms in a condition of the most helpless and degrading inebriety. But a change soon came over the spirit of their dream when Colonel Grant assumed the command.

He had not previously been in the 144th, but was sent to it in consequence of Colonel Murray falling a victim to fever in the West Indies. The step was not permitted to go in the regiment, as the officer next in command was much the same kind of person as the colonel, therefore no improvement could be hoped for under his auspices.

Climate and fast-living nearly decimated the corps, many of the officers exchanged or sold out, and a new order of things began in the 144th.

Colonel Grant commenced with the officers, as their lead was naturally certain to be followed by the men under their command. He spoke to them kindly, but firmly, saying he was most anxious to put matters on a different footing in the regiment, and that he looked to them for their support and co-operation, He could not possibly punish the men for debauchery and permit the officers to go scot free; therefore he trusted to their good sense and gentlemanly feeling to prevent a recurrence of the degrading scenes it was his firm resolution to endure no longer.

At first there was some grumbling and a bad feeling among a few towards the colonel, but he took no notice of it, and persevered in his determination; but always in the most open and judicious manner—no one could accuse him of the slightest partiality; he was equally strict with officers as with men—nay, he was more rigorous with the former, as he said that from them more might reasonably be expected.

The improvement came, gradually but surely; and now it was the boast and pride of Colonel Grant that not a regiment in the service bore a better character for steadiness and sobriety than the 144th.

Now and then there might be an outbreak, and among the juniors there were occasionally scenes similar to those which greeted my entrance into the corps, but these were of rare occurrence; had it been otherwise Colonel Grant would at once have interfered, and a hint from him was as effectual as a severe reprimand would be from many others.

Major Thompson and Major Gordon, the two next in command, assisted in carrying out the colonel's views; and it is always a great thing for the junior officers of a regiment when their seniors set them a good example, and are men fully entitled to respect and confidence. There is much truth in the old saying, "What the old cock crows, the young one learns."

And if this is true with respect to young men who have had every advantage in the way of education and refining society, who have had good principles instilled into them from their earliest infancy, and may reasonably be expected to distinguish right from wrong and act accordingly—how much more must it apply to the young untutored soldier in the ranks, who has had no such advantages—nay, who has more probably been brought up in the worst possible moral atmosphere, and has had his perceptions of right and wrong blunted almost before he was old enough to understand the difference.

For such a case as this, strict discipline and the still greater benefit of good example will be found the only efficacious methods to be employed; and it was by these

means that Colonel Grant had worked a reform in the 144th.

He sensibly observed that idleness was the great bane of a military life, and the many unoccupied hours which a soldier will so seldom employ in any rational or improving manner; therefore he set himself to endeavour to cure this, by finding some occupation for his men which should engage their leisure hours more profitably than smoking and card playing.

He secured the services of a good schoolmaster, and had evening classes for such of the men as chose to attend them. Here they were taught all the elements of a plain education; and the room was soon filled with a crowd of eager and willing pupils, many of whom made rapid progress.

A reading-room was also arranged for the use of the men, which was well supplied with many cheap and excellent publications; it was well lighted and well ventilated, and a good blazing fire diffused a comfortable warmth; all these advantages were soon appreciated by the soldiers, and Colonel Grant had the satisfaction of knowing that he had despoiled many a neighbouring tap-room of its accustomed visitors, who were now devoting to Cook's Voyages or the Life of Napoleon Bonaparte the hours they had hitherto spent in the low and riotous conviviality of an alehouse parlour.

This is a lengthy digression, but I cannot consider it an unimportant one. In the course of a long experience I have seen so much the reverse of all I have now described, that I am the more anxious to add my testimony in favour of what has struck me so forcibly as being the duty of every commanding officer; though,

alas! in only too many cases it is carelessly slurred over or altogether neglected.

But now to return to the 144th. An offence of a very grave nature had been committed in the regiment, one also which had been strictly forbidden by Colonel Grant, namely, conveying ardent spirits to the soldiers in hospital. On two or three occasions in which it had previously happened, the malady under which the men were labouring was greatly increased; one man being brought to the very brink of the grave. Therefore Colonel Grant had issued most stringent orders respecting it; and had declared that the next man who was found disobeying his commands should receive a punishment of fifty lashes.

This had the effect of checking the practice for a time, though I doubt not the order was frequently evaded; still, as no man was caught in the very fact of conveying spirits to his sick comrades, no punishment had as yet taken place.

But one unlucky morning a fine young Highlander, called Fraser, was detected in the commission of the forbidden offence. One of the sergeants came suddenly upon two men, one of whom was Fraser; and this latter instantly concealed something in his great coat, and was making off when the sergeant stopped him, and desired to know what he had in his hand.

Fraser hesitated, and looked very confused; the other man, a surly, insolent fellow, of the name of Corry, instantly confronted the sergeant, and asked him in a disagreeable tone what business it was of his? His suspicions now thoroughly roused, the sergeant insisted on seeing the concealed article; when a scuffle took place between him and Corry, who endeavoured

to make him quit his grasp of Fraser, so as to enable the latter to escape with his prize.

In the course of the struggle Corry gave the sergeant a violent blow, and would have repeated it, only a party of the guard were by this time on the spot; and the two offenders were secured and immediately placed in confinement. A court-martial was held on the case; the result of which was that Fraser was proved guilty of the attempt to convey spirits to the hospital, (indeed he confessed it at once,) and was sentenced to receive fifty lashes; while Corry for aiding and abetting him, and for his attack on Sergeant Grey, was sentenced to receive one hundred lashes and be imprisoned for two months.

No regret was felt for the punishment awarded to Corry; he was an old offender, one of the few evil spirits in the regiment, and he had most richly deserved his sentence; but there was a great feeling of compassion for Fraser, who was a fine soldier-like young fellow, very popular with his comrades, and much liked by the officers with whom he had been brought into contact.

Unfortunately, owing to the limited accommodation contained in our present barracks, it had been found necessary to billet a number of the men on different houses in the neighbourhood; and among those was the young Highlander, Fraser. His billet was upon a small public-house of the lowest description, frequented by the very worst class of the Dublin population; and associating as he was almost necessarily compelled to do with the people usually to be met there, he had gradually acquired a weakness for ardent spirits; and it was while partially under the influence of intoxication that Corry had persuaded

him to undertake the deed for which he was now in confinement.

He belonged to Captain Lacy's company, and was a great favourite with him; so that he was more especially concerned about the sad scrape into which the poor young fellow had brought himself.

An application for pardon or for a mitigation of his punishment, made by Captain Lacy to Colonel Grant, was firmly denied; the colonel said no one could regret the whole affair more sincerely than he did, but his word had been passed—Ronald Fraser had committed the offence with a due knowledge of its penalty, and the discipline of the regiment demanded the carrying out of the sentence.

Captain Lacy felt the justice of the decision, and allowed that Colonel Grant could not have acted in any other manner; but he was much distressed about the poor lad, who had hitherto conducted himself in a more than usually exemplary manner, and until quite lately had been particularly distinguished for extreme sobriety. I met him in the barrack-yard on his way to visit poor Fraser, and he asked me if I would accompany him, as he really dreaded encountering the spectacle of the wretched man's distress.

"He is a very respectable fellow," said Lacy, compassionately, "and will feel the degradation of such a punishment very severely; far more so than many would."

We entered the place where Fraser was confined.

He was alone, and started up joyfully on seeing Captain Lacy: a vivid hope was written in his countenance that we were the bearers of good tidings, but this expectation was speedily dissipated.

"I am very sorry, Fraser, to find you where you

are," said Captain Lacy; "I never thought to have seen you in trouble of this kind."

The poor man coloured deeply, and said in a humble tone, "Ah! captain, I never expected it myself; it's a terrible thing for me to know what is hanging over me;" and he glanced at us so piteously that I could not look at him, and turned away.

"Indeed it is, Fraser," replied Lacy, in a kind, but decided tone; "but you know that you deserve punishment for what you did; it was done in the face of Colonel Grant's warning, and you know that what he says he always performs."

"I know that," said poor Fraser, sorrowfully; "but oh! captain, if you would but speak a word for me, I would thank you for your kindness to my dying day. The disgrace will kill me, captain; I can never bear up against it."

"I *have* spoken to Colonel Grant, Fraser," replied Lacy; "I told him that I had always had a very good opinion of you, and that in the present case, you had been led away by drinking and bad companions; and I said I was sure this would be a lesson to you; and then I begged him to punish you in some other way."

"And what did he say, captain dear?" asked the poor fellow, in a broken voice, the tears starting to his eyes as he put the question.

"He said that it could not be," replied Captain Lacy, gently; "his word was passed, Fraser; in the face of the whole regiment he gave this order, and a proper regard for truth and justice compels him to see it carried out."

Fraser turned deadly pale.

"Oh! captain! Oh! captain, dear, is there no escape?" he exclaimed, in accents of the deepest

anguish; "must I be flogged? Brought to shame and disgrace before the whole regiment? If it had been anything else, any other punishment, it would not have been so bad; but to be flogged! Oh! I can never bear it!" He threw himself on the ground, and buried his face in his trembling hands. I was much moved, and would have given a great deal to be able to reverse the sentence that filled with agony this proud spirit. There were a few moments of silence; and then Captain Lacy said, in an unsteady voice,

"I am very sorry for you, Fraser; more sorry than I can tell you; and I sincerely trust this will be a lesson to you to act more wisely in future; you used to be one of the soberest men in the company, but within the last few weeks I have not had quite so good a report of you, and it has vexed me very much."

"It's being at the Rose and Shamrock that has done it," replied Fraser; "I was sober enough till I went there; but they are always drinking, and wanting others to drink, and I just fell into their ways."

"Well, Fraser, they have brought you to harm, and I am very sorry for it, my poor fellow; you will be wiser again; and now I must leave you; but I wished you to know that I did not forget you, but tried to prevail on the colonel to change your punishment."

"It was very good of you, captain, but I was sure you would not forget a soldier in trouble, and one of your own men too. Oh! sir, I am sorry to have brought this disgrace upon the company; there hasn't been a man flogged in it for four years, and to think that I should be the next! It will break my heart, captain; it will, indeed;" and his voice was choked with the struggling sobs.

"Come, Fraser, bear up like a man," said Captain

Lacy, laying his hand kindly on his shoulder. "Nobody will think the worse of you for it, and you will soon regain Colonel Grant's good opinion when he hears you are a reformed character."

Poor Fraser shook his head sadly, and Lacy and I wished him good day, and took our departure.

Captain Lacy's brow was clouded, and his usual gay expression had given place to one of gloomy meditation.

"I can't say how vexed I am about this poor fellow," he observed; "he is such a fine, dashing young soldier, and I fear this will break his spirit entirely. Some men never get over a flogging."

"It is a horrid punishment," I replied; "I wonder it is not entirely abolished."

"There is much less than formerly," said Lacy; "but I fancy it can never be quite done away with. For a certain class of men it seems to be absolutely necessary; they mind nothing else, and that not very much. Besides, to a certain extent it exercises a beneficial effect upon the others; leaves a salutary impression on their minds. With some men fear alone acts as a restraint; nothing else will do."

"It is very unlucky that poor Fraser should have been the first caught," I observed.

"Very," replied Lacy; "still Colonel Grant could not with justice do otherwise than punish him; it would have caused a great deal of grumbling in the regiment, and I knew my application was hopeless."

A punishment parade was ordered for the next day, and the whole regiment turned out to see the sentence carried into effect.

It was a cold raw morning, and the gloom of the weather seemed to extend itself to the countenances

and hearts of all present. A similar scene had not occurred for a length of time; many of the young soldiers had never before witnessed anything of the kind, and their faces wore an expression of grave curiosity, as they stood silent and motionless in the ranks.

Fraser was the first brought out. His sentence was read, and he was tied up to the halberds.

I glanced at him as he came on the ground, and though he never once raised his eyes, and his paleness was almost ghastly, yet his expression was firm and unflinching; he was evidently resolved to bear his punishment like a man.

The cat was wielded by a tall and powerful drummer, and at the word of command he lifted it slowly, and brought it down heavily on the exposed back and shoulders of poor Fraser.

I sickened at the dull horrid sound, and the dark red line which marked where the blow had fallen.

One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six. His back was soon all raw and bleeding, and heavy drops of crimson blood fell on the ground every time that the cat was raised. But not a groan had yet escaped his lips; only his teeth were firmly clenched together, and great beads of dew stood on his pallid brow. Still the blows descended strong and steadily; but now white-faced soldiers might be seen turning aside or staggering in the direction of the barracks, and one or two young lads were carried off in a fainting state.

It was a horrid sight, and I felt every nerve in my body tingle as the punishment slowly proceeded. At Fraser I now dared look no longer; the spectacle was too shocking.

Thirty-five blows had now marked his back with

their bloody traces, and he had yet borne them with the most unflinching fortitude; but as the thirty-sixth made its savage impress on the quivering flesh, his overtaxed powers gave way; exhausted nature could no longer endure the frightful torture, and with one deep groan his muscles became relaxed, and he hung suspended in a condition of total insensibility. Restoratives were at hand, and he became partially conscious; but the surgeon declared he could endure no more, and Colonel Grant remitted the remainder of his sentence, and gave the order for his removal. Corry was then tied up, and his punishment inflicted in the same manner.

But he bore it very differently. The most horrible curses—the most blasphemous language, burst from his lips; at one moment he was screaming out the most frantic entreaties for mercy and pardon, and declaring he would never offend again if let off this once; and immediately afterwards he was abusing Colonel Grant and the other officers in the vilest terms, and calling them by the most opprobrious epithets.

He was a strongly-built, muscular man, and bore a greater number of blows without injury; at least, he still remained sensible when his back and shoulders were in a state quite impossible to describe.

His groans and cries, however, were most dreadful; and faint and sick, I longed for the termination of the wretched scene, when a hand was laid heavily on my arm, and a hoarse voice whispered, "Come with me."

I felt very giddy and overcome, and looking up could just distinguish Lascelles with a pale face and compressed lips. He passed his arm through mine,

and led me away a few steps; but his kind intervention came too late, everything floated round me, and I fell fainting into the arms of two of the soldiers, who carried me into the barracks, where I very soon came round.

I shall never forget that day's punishment; it was long before I recovered the horrible impression it made upon me, and I am truly thankful to add that I never witnessed another flogging.

It may be a necessary punishment; wiser heads than mine deny the possibility of entirely abolishing it; but oh! it is a humiliating and a degrading spectacle, and I pray that I may never be under the necessity either of inflicting it or having to witness its infliction.

I visited Fraser in the hospital, and found him in the most painful state of low spirits and morbid depression. He said that he hoped he might die, as he could never again endure to face his fellow-creatures; and it was only by main force that he could be induced to swallow the nourishment requisite for sustaining life.

Poor fellow, his wish was granted; for before he was sufficiently recovered to leave the hospital, he was seized with a low fever then prevalent in the neighbourhood, and in a very short time he fell a victim to it.

I was almost relieved at his fate, for I do not think he would ever have got over his disgrace, and men under such circumstances have been known to make away with themselves; though sometimes it has the contrary effect of hardening and corrupting them, and they ultimately become the most desperate among the disaffected spirits of a regiment.

This was the case with the man Corry, who had

always been a bad and vicious character, but who was now hardened to a degree that rendered him a perfect nuisance to the corps; and not many months afterwards he was drummed out of the 144th, and being almost immediately convicted of a daring and violent robbery and assault, he received sentence of transportation for life, and was sent out to the penal settlements of New South Wales.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FAT CORNET.

"ARE you here, Charley?" exclaimed Harry Leicester, inflicting a loud thump on the panel of my door one rainy afternoon, when I had retired to my own sanctum for the purpose of clearing off a huge accumulation of epistolary debts; then, without waiting for a reply, he burst into the room, and throwing himself into an easy chair, he indulged in a hearty and prolonged fit of merriment.

"What is the matter?" I replied, suspending operations and staring at him; "what's the joke?"

"Come to mess to-day and you'll see," said Harry. "There's been a new fellow expected all this week, and he turned up this morning. By Jove! he nearly finished us all; I have not got over it yet;" and Harry threw back his handsome head, and went off into a fresh explosion.

"What is he like?" I inquired.

"The fattest man I ever put my eyes on—a couple of Daniel Lamberts rolled into one; and such a goose into the bargain; believes everything he is told, till there's absolutely no fun in cramming him. The colonel only comes back to-day, and won't see him

till mess; but I wouldn't lose their first meeting for a thousand pounds. He'll take a fit, I believe, for he piques himself on our all being rather good-looking fellows—eh, Charley?—and this importation won't pass muster."

"What is his name? and where does he come from?"

"To mend the matter, as it happens, he is called Potts. Pretty appellation, is it not? Where he hails from I have not the remotest conception—doesn't matter much; we shan't want to pick up any more of them. However, I think I heard his people were butchers or graziers, or something of that kind; anyway, he has lots of beef about him—seems to have taken kindly to the grazing."

"I'll come and have a look at him," I replied.

"He's worth it," said Leicester; "but come early and see the fun. Cornet Potts—oh! Lord, what a name! Give me an ounce of civet, Charley; but as the article is probably not at hand, I'll take a cigar instead; your last batch are capital. Who are you scribbling to, old fellow? Give her my love if she's pretty."

Very punctually I arrived at the cavalry barracks, and found several of the officers assembled; but Cornet Potts had not yet descended from his toilet. Colonel Fitzneville was generally late; he had not made his appearance either.

"How do, Nugent?" said Major Lumley, shaking hands with me; "come to have a look at our fat boy, eh? He is a remarkably fine specimen, I assure you. Does credit to his bringing up."

"Couldn't we exhibit him, aw—" inquired Captain Bolton, softly caressing his jetty moustache; "turn

an honest penny by his—aw—wemarkable circumference?"

"Not a bad idea, 'pon honour," said Leicester, who just then joined us; "only thing the fellow's good for that I can see. Let's suggest it to him. Half shares for him and us."

The subject of these flattering encomiums just then entered the room; and I candidly confess it was no trifling effort to maintain a grave countenance while being introduced to him.

If I had not seen him with my own eyes, I should have had great difficulty in believing in the existence of anything so fat; how he came to dream of entering the army was a perfect mystery; how he was permitted to do so, a still greater. His body was enormous, and his face a regular sea of fat, his features appearing mere specks lost in the immensity of space; a heavy, stolid expression, and fishy blue eyes completed this agreeable picture, the effect of which was considerably heightened by glancing round the room at the handsome dashing men sitting and standing in every variety of attitude, the contrast of whose appearance was so great that they looked like beings of a different order.

Presently Colonel Fitzneville made his appearance, calm, haughty, and distinguished-looking, as he always was. He was a very fine-looking man, perhaps the handsomest in the regiment; but his expression was very arrogant and overbearing, though among intimates he could unbend, and when he chose, be very agreeable. He dispensed greetings right and left, including a very cordial one to myself; and then, suddenly finding himself just in front of the new-comer, who wore the mess-jacket of the 21st, and was apparently a

member of that illustrious corps, he glanced at him from head to foot, frowned till his eyebrows met over his dark, piercing eyes, and said in a tone of frigid politeness, "And pray whom have we here? I am not aware——"

"Mr. Potts, colonel," said Major Lumley, stepping forwards; "he arrived this morning in your absence."

"Mr.—aw—whom did you say? I beg your pardon, Lumley; I did not exactly catch the—aw—" and the colonel directed a far from amiable glance towards the unlucky cornet, while Leicester poked me with his arm, and whispered, "Told you the colonel wouldn't like the joke."

"Mr. Potts," repeated the major, in a clear ringing voice, for he rather enjoyed the whole business, and gave out the obnoxious appellation particularly distinctly: "Cornet Potts, colonel; only joined to-day." "Potts! Potts! *Potts!*" replied the colonel, savagely; "did not know there was such a name; very extraordinary one, I must say." He measured the fat youth from head to foot with a contemptuous glance, uttered a barely civil "How are you?" and dinner being announced at the moment, he turned away with an air of most unmitigated disgust, and strode haughtily into the mess-room.

Far from pleasant was Colonel the Honourable Neville Fitzneville that day. He ate his dinner pretty nearly in silence, occasionally directing a furious glance at the corpulent cornet, who appeared rather overcome with his reception, and not much disposed for conversation either; though the others politely asked him to take wine with them, and endeavoured to trot him out to the best of their ability.

"God bless me!" said the colonel, in an aside to Major Lumley, "what have we done that this creature should be inflicted on us? For Heaven's sake, let us get rid of him as soon as possible; we shall be a laughing-stock to the service."

"He is peculiar—no doubt of that," said the major, laughing.

"Peculiar! he is the most horrid monster I ever set my eyes on;" and the colonel rose with an indignant air, and departed to fulfil an evening engagement.

"Our chief is in a sweet humour," said Leicester, cheerfully; "I wouldn't be in that poor devil's shoes at parade to-morrow for a trifle. Daniel Lambert will find himself in for something the reverse of agreeable."

The others now gathered round the new comer, who gradually warmed under the influence of the wine with which they plied him, and an amazing amount of very curious information he imparted to us all. So remarkably simple and green a youth I had not often encountered; but with all his ignorance he had the stubborn obstinacy peculiar to fools, and clearly thought he knew a great deal better than other people.

He let out that his father had wished him to remain at home and follow his very lucrative profession; but a weakness for the glittering paraphernalia of a military life had somehow or other got into the youth's empty noddle, and *coûte qui coûte* he insisted on being a soldier.

His obstinacy carried the day against the paternal advice and wishes, and the result was his arrival to join the 21st Hussars; though as he was by this time in a happy state of maudlin intoxication, he informed

us that his father had warned him he would very soon tire of soldiering, and that his brother-officers would only make a fool of him, and torment his life out of him.

"Remarkably sensible old gentleman," said Bolton, *sotto voce;* "by Jove! aw——I should like to make his acquaintance."

"People always like their prophecies to come true," said Harry Leicester, "and the old boy will find his words verified in a very short time. I see Daniel Lambert is on the point of disappearing under the table; when he is fairly there, I vote for embellishing his beautiful countenance with a few touches of high art. There's room for us all to try our hands upon him, and each can stick to the style he likes best."

We were all slightly elevated, and the proposal was received with unanimous approbation; besides, the 21st were rather given to amusements of this description, and very few weeks passed without their being convicted of some practical joke against her Majesty's lieges.

Cornet Potts was accordingly placed in a gracefully reclining attitude in a chair; and Harry Leicester, as principal operator, commenced his "little improvements," as he called them.

"Some idiot has declared that beauty unadorned is adorned the most," he soliloquized, as, brush in hand, he calmly surveyed the sleeping porpoise before him; "but this remark I hold to be rank folly, and calculated to do an incredible deal of mischief. It is one of those popular delusions that everybody credits because nobody will take the trouble to contradict them. Now look here; will anybody say that a couple of—well-defined eyebrows—" here he gave

Potts an extremely well-developed pair—"are not a very great adornment to this sleeping beauty? Silence gives consent; so I take it for granted that our friend is considered to be benefited by these little touches."

"Give him moustaches, Harry," said Cornet Wylde; "they're the only pair he is ever likely to have."

"Those little adjuncts shall not be forgotten," replied Leicester, gravely. "There they go—by Jove! the fellow's getting quite handsome. Now let me see the effect from a little distance. Very good indeed. Our friend's ruling expression is rather difficult to find; I should say his face is like Viola's history, 'a blank, my lord.' Now a bad expression is decidedly better than none at all, so we'll give him a touch of ferocity; lamp black is a useful invention. I'm blessed if his worthy father, the grazier, would recognise his own flesh and blood."

Several of the others now lent a helping hand, and the unconscious Potts received a nose of a brightly rubicund tint, and cheeks to match; while everybody put a touch here and a stroke there, as their taste or fancy guided them, till his visage was one mass of streaks and patches, and the only thing he resembled was the harlequin in a pantomime.

"He'll about do, now," said Leicester, giving him a final touch on the chin; "it's as neat a bit of painting as one would wish to see."

"Doosed good imitation of a chessboard," observed Bolton, inspecting him through his eye-glass; "pity the fellow can't see himself—aw. By Jove! how he'd stare."

"We have no intention of denying him that little gratification," replied Leicester; "I should think not, indeed! The pleasing sight will greet his eyes the

first thing in the morning—wonder what he'll think of himself?" and Leicester laid down his brush, and laughed heartily as he gazed on the absurd-looking spectacle that Cornet Potts now presented.

The somnolent youth was then carried to his own apartment, and laid on his bed.

He was very indignant next morning when he looked in the glass, and discovered how he had been decorated; and in the course of the day he appealed to Colonel Fitzneville, who looked extremely disgusted at his presumption, and told him that the matter was no concern of his; Mr. Potts was old enough to take care of himself. In fact, the colonel wished to get rid of him, and would have winked at any proceedings calculated to drive him from the regiment. The other officers seeing this, acted accordingly, and the unfortunate cornet's existence soon became a thing by no means to be envied; it was wonderful that the constant annoyances he encountered had not the effect of reducing his enormous bulk; but, on the contrary, he seemed to grow larger every day.

They blackened one side of his face, and left the other *au naturel;* they filled his boots with water, and his bed with broken-glass; they cut his uniform into little shreds, and, fitting them skilfully together, laid it on his bed as if ready for wearing; in fact, they left nothing undone that could aggravate the poor wretch, who stood it all meekly enough for some time, though his submission had anything but the effect of wearing out his tormentors.

He wrote long letters home and poured his complaints into the paternal ear; but the worthy old grazier did not mind them at first, and seemed to think his hopeful son was only "sarved right" for his

folly in preferring the idle life of a soldier to the profitable employment of training oxen in the way they should go; therefore his sympathy was not forthcoming. However, at last, he did become indignant at the repeated practical jokes of which his unlucky offspring was the victim; and one fine day down came the old gentleman upon the unlicensed jokers, and having written a very irate letter to the commander-in-chief, a court-martial was ordered to sit in judgment on the whole affair, and the officers of the 21st found themselves rather in a scrape.

However, they came off pretty well on the whole; their good interest and high connexions helped them through the business; and the trial ended with a strong denunciation of the system of practical joking from the presiding judge, and a gentle reprimand to Colonel Fitzneville and his officers, accompanied by a hint that if the offence were repeated, the next sentence would not be such a mild one.

The unfortunate youth was now sent to Coventry by the whole regiment; and after a faint attempt at resistance he fairly knocked under, and the Gazette speedily contained the welcome announcement:—

"Rupert Godwin, gent., to be cornet by purchase, *vice* Potts, resigned."

## CHAPTER IV.

### PERCY LASCELLES.

About this time a number of recruits belonging to the 144th and several other infantry regiments were ordered to embark in a steamer sailing from Glasgow to Dublin. The draft also included some invalids who had been left behind, and a number of soldiers who had been on leave; and owing to the illness of the officer left in charge, it became necessary that some one should go over and take the command. The duty devolved on Captain Lascelles, and I accompanied him in the capacity of subaltern.

We accordingly crossed over, collected the various soldiers and recruits, and embarked on board one of the large steam-packets which left Glasgow late in the afternoon, and generally arrived off Dublin about ten o'clock the next morning.

There was a fine fresh breeze which carried us pleasantly along, and Lascelles and I being good sailors, did not suffer in the least from the motion of the vessel, though a considerable number of the passengers were compelled to quit the deck and take refuge on the sofas of the state cabin.

There were seven or eight ladies on board; one a

very pretty young creature, the wife of an Indian cavalry officer; his name was Captain Malcolm, and they were now on their bridal excursion, a trip to Dublin and the Lakes of Killarney.

The wind fell towards night, the glorious beams of a clear full moon lighted up the wide expanse of waters; it was one of those enchanting evenings that tempt you to linger long on the deck, and make you look forward with double horror to your close poky berth, and the ill-ventilated atmosphere that awaits you below; and Lascelles and I leant over the bulwarks and smoked our fragrant cheroots, beguiling the time with pleasant converse, not caring that every one but ourselves had retired, and that with the exception of a few sailors, we alone remained occupants of the deck. I scarcely knew how the conversation veered round to the point that it did, but imperceptibly it became more and more confidential; and Percy spoke to me again of his dead brother, which was a very rare occurrence with him, and then he said he would fulfil his promise and tell me something of his past history, if I cared to hear it.

Having eagerly assured him on this point, he began with a slight sketch of his early life, some of which I had previously gathered either from himself or from others; and with which it is not particularly necessary that the reader should become acquainted.

His father was a man of moderate fortune, and Percy and his younger brother Charley were the whole of his family; but an orphan cousin, called Maurice Vincent, about a year younger than Percy, was a constant visitor, and almost occupied the place of a third brother in the house. His disposition was very frank and noble, and Percy was much attached to him, and

the two boys grew up to manhood fast and sincere friends. But now I will let Lascelles speak for himself; he will tell his story better than I can.

"I have no intention of inflicting you with a *catalogue raisonné* of my relations, Charley; but besides Maurice Vincent, I must introduce to your notice two others, as they both exercised no inconsiderable influence on my after life.

*Place aux dames,* (he said with a bitter laugh;) one was a young girl called Florence Templeton, nearly the most beautiful creature I have ever seen in my life, but at the same time the most thorough-paced coquette that ever breathed. Her mother was one of those horrid manœuvring women who are always on the *qui vive* for eligibles, and value a man only according to his acres or his gold; and at her door I lay most of the faults that marred the character of her daughter.

But don't think that I saw them, Charley—far from it. At the time of which I speak, I was blinder than ever lover was before; I told you, my boy, that I had not been exempted from the toils of the tender passion. I was another Samson in the lap of Delilah, and my fair enslaver was my cousin Florence Templeton. I am not given to raving about ebon locks and transparent complexions, so you must not expect to hear in detail the charms to which I fell a willing victim; Florence was a dazzlingly fair blonde, with an expression of confiding innocence that had beguiled many into believing her the artless girl she looked. It was difficult to gaze into those softly-pleading eyes, and think them the false mirrors of a worldly and calculating soul; but it was so, Charley—she had

profited by her scheming mother's instructions, and was not one whit behind that admirable woman in sordid speculations and crafty designs for her own aggrandizement. As children, we had often met, and passed much of our time together; and Maurice and I submitted to her girlish caprices, and strove to propitiate the little beauty with gifts suited to our limited finances; Florence even at that age displaying a knowing spirit, and bestowing the largest portion of her favour on the most liberal giver.

Time rolled on, and Maurice Vincent and I grew up to man's estate.

He had early evinced a strong predilection for a sailor's life; and there being no reason why it should not be indulged, he was entered as a midshipman in the Royal Navy; and a year or two before I received my commission in the 144th, Maurice went to sea.

The other relative whose introduction is essential to my story was an aged granduncle, an immensely wealthy and excessively crotchety invalid; who detested his heirs and successors individually and collectively, and always allowed it to be understood that he meant to leave every penny of his fortune in charity.

Maurice and I were about equally related to him, and it was occasionally thought just probable that the old gentleman might change his mind after all, and at any rate leave us a slice of his fortune; but we gave little heed to this supposition—we were old enough to know that "waiting for dead men's shoes" is both weary and unprofitable work; especially as we believed, after all, we might never have the chance of stepping into them.

Much about the same time that Maurice went to sea for the first time, Mrs. Templeton and Florence

took their departure for the Continent; where the young lady was put through a course of fashionable accomplishments, and grafted a large supply of foreign embellishments on her previous orthodox training.

I was gazetted to the 144th, and knocked about with it from station to station for several years.

Among other places we were for some time quartered at Malta; and here, to my great astonishment, I found the Templetons, who were spending the winter there on account of some real or fancied delicacy on the part of Mrs. Templeton. Florence was now a very lovely girl of sixteen, more womanly and advanced than is usual with women of her age in England, and with a manner the most winning and irresistible that it is possible to conceive. As cousins we were naturally much together, nor did Mrs. Templeton appear to see any danger to her daughter in the intimacy; though some prudent mothers might have imagined that a charming girl like Florence and a dashing young subaltern would have been the better of a more careful *surveillance* than was deemed necessary in our case.

But Mrs. Templeton had too much confidence in the result of her well-grounded precepts to have any fears for her beautiful daughter, whose affections were far too carefully tutored and too much under her own control for them to run any risk of betraying her into an attachment so utterly beneath her notice as a poor lieutenant in the army. Florence would have arched her swan-like neck and curled her exquisite lip with whole volumes of scorn at such an idea; she was reserved for far different and better things.

But the young coquette liked to have a good-looking fellow (*cela va sans dire,* Charley) at her beck and

call: she liked me to bring her bouquets and help her to arrange them, or to sit by and watch her while she did it herself. I think I see her now—her long fair curls mingling with the bright and perfumed blossoms, her little white hands fluttering in and out among the flowers as she proceeded with her graceful task, sometimes affecting to consult my taste, and at other times declaring that I had none at all, and that she did not believe I knew a rose from a geranium. Perhaps I did not when she was arranging them, for I was looking at her and not at the flowers; and she knew it well, Charley—she knew it well. Often I would beg for one bright blossom for myself, and if she were in a compliant mood, and my request were granted, those little fingers would affix it to my coat; and my brow would burn and my heart beat quickly as I felt that slight pressure, and could have bent and touched the scented curls that drooped upon my shoulder as she leant over me to do my bidding. Sometimes I would make a garland of the flowers and with it crown those beautiful fair tresses; and once I remember wishing it were a coronet and I its fortunate possessor.

"Ah! how nice that would be, Percy," she said, laughing, "I should have no objection to wear a coronet. But perhaps you would not give it to me then," and she glanced at me with arch simplicity, and began pulling to pieces the petals of a rose.

"You know better, Florence," I replied; "but perhaps I should not then be permitted to place it on that fair brow."

"How stupid of us talking such nonsense!" she observed quickly, her colour slightly heightened. "I had better be contented with my coronet of flowers, as

I am not likely to be tempted with any other. They don't grow quite so thick as those lovely roses;" and she gathered one as she spoke, and held it up to me for admiration.

I never quite understood her sudden changes of manner; she was at one moment all melting tenderness and the next full of caprice and flightiness; but in every mood she was fascinating, and I think that this uncertainty as to the state in which I might find her only tended to deepen the spell of an attachment that was now gradually enthralling me, though as yet I was scarcely sensible of its influence, and had some faint idea that I considered Florence as a pretty cousin and nothing more. But this state of matters did not last long.

Associating with her constantly in the familiar intercourse of domestic life, riding together, and wandering with her by twilight and moonlight in the charming orange groves around their villa; looking into those bright and beguiling eyes, and listening to the accents of her low silvery voice, it will not seem strange that I loved Florence Templeton—loved her with a devotion of which I can now scarcely believe I was ever capable, so altered do the feelings become in the course of a few short years. To the very last I was doubtful whether she ever loved me in return; there were times when I thought that she did, then again I was uncertain. Now I know that to love truly was not in her nature, a nature where self-love reigned supreme; but when it suited her purpose to assume the semblance of attachment, there is little doubt she could do it only too well. I think I loved her better in consequence of her capricious ways than I should have done had she been invariably kind and tender;

I have always fancied that I should weary of a woman who was unchangingly placid and affectionate; such a disposition would cloy me with its perpetual sweets; there is no doubt that uncertainty is a very stimulating quality in love as in everything else.

I rather think Florence was well aware of the truth of this axiom; she was a good judge of character, and could adapt herself very successfully to the disposition of any one whom she particularly wished to charm. She was very musical, and had a beautiful voice, which had been admirably cultivated. Music has always been a passion with me; at that period I devoted a great deal of time to it, and without vanity, I may say I sang well.

Florence and I practised together, our voices harmonized well, and many and many a happy hour did we spend in this way. Ah! Charley, the world wore its brightest hues for me that happy winter at Malta.

But at last we were ordered to leave; and the prospect of separation opened my eyes, and showed me that life would be utterly valueless if Florence Templeton and I were destined to pass through it as strangers. I told her that I loved her and that my happiness was in her keeping; and Florence blushed and cast down her lovely eyes, and said that her mother must decide for her, as her will and wishes were her law.

Now, Mrs. Templeton was determined that her daughter should marry brilliantly, and become the wife of a man of large property and a first-rate position; as a lieutenant in the 144th, I certainly did not answer this description; and I should at once have received a sentence of dismissal, only for my chance of succeeding to the broad acres of Deerhurst, and the

immense wealth that my aged relative was known to have accumulated.

Were I eventually to become his heir, Florence would at once be placed in the very position she coveted; and this was a contingency Mrs. Templeton could not make up her mind entirely to neglect. Therefore the judicious old lady temporized matters, but so skilfully that I never even suspected her design. I was very green, then, Charley; and I was fondly and enthusiastically in love.

She assured me that Florence and I were yet too young to know our own minds, that she disapproved of early engagements, and should wish her daughter to see a little more of the world before she decided her fate in life.

She spoke kindly and plausibly enough, and I believed her; and she did not at all give me to understand that she objected to a connexion with me, only that we were both too young, and another very important reason, both too poor to marry at present. Therefore I quitted Malta a free man, as far as any engagement was concerned; but, as they both well knew, bound heart and soul to the beautiful coquette who had wound her potent chain so skilfully around me. Nearly two years passed before we met again.

The Templetons were then living in London; and among all the fair and fashionable girls that were the ornaments of every gay assemblage, few could compare with Florence, now a recognised and reigning belle.

Everything that she did was perfect; and only that I was far too desperately in love to see the slightest defect in one so beautiful, I might have missed the simplicity and ignorance of the world and its ways, that are such great charms in a young girl on the

very threshold of life. But who could be the constant companion of a woman like Mrs. Templeton and retain any traces of artlessness? Nothing short of a miracle could have accomplished this.

I had leave of absence for some time; and it was a great gratification to me when I received a letter from Maurice Vincent, informing me that his ship was just then being paid off, and in a very short time he should be able to join me in London.

He came—a gay, frank, young fellow, the very model of a British sailor, manly and handsome, with a mind as open and confiding as a child; I never met with any one so perfectly free from jealousy or suspicion.

We were fast friends, and went everywhere together; to me, who had seen so much more of life than he had done, shut up in the narrow limits of a ship, his fresh enjoyment of everything was delightful; and his never-ceasing flow of spirits was in itself irresistible; it was impossible ever to feel dull or gloomy with so cheerful a companion. Of course, he was a great deal at the Templetons, Florence treating us both apparently the same, with the easy familiarity natural to cousins; it was only when she and I were alone, that we ever resumed our old understanding; though even now it was the same story—all the caprices of a petted beauty one day, and on the next such enchanting tenderness that I was more entirely her slave than ever.

I have no doubt she pursued the same kind of game with Maurice Vincent; he was easily victimized, poor fellow; and ere long I knew that we were rivals for the love of one who cared not a straw for either of us. Strangely enough he never imagined this to

be the case; he was far too honest-hearted himself to conceive the existence of such duplicity; and as Florence made him believe she was not indifferent to him, scarcely any line of conduct she could have pursued would have shaken his faith in her truth. But I saw that he loved her, and I reproached her with encouraging him in what must lead in the end to such bitter disappointment.

She affected to disbelieve me, and said it was only the liking of a cousin; and when I grew more serious, she became cold and indifferent, said she was free to receive any attentions she chose, and that jealousy was a failing for which she had a peculiar horror—a jealous husband she would never willingly encounter.

Only that she knew her power over me, she had not dared to go so far; fearful of losing her, I forgave everything; many a coolness, many a quarrel we had, ever followed by a reconciliation so delicious as to make amends for all. And yet, Charley, you thought I had never been in love.

To make a long story short, the old relation of which I have before told you, died; his will was read, and, to the astonishment of all and the disgust of a good many, I was declared his heir.

It was in the middle of autumn, but I yet lingered in town, for the Templetons were still there; Maurice had accepted a shooting invitation to Scotland. He was also remembered in the old gentleman's will—a sum of ten thousand pounds having been specially bequeathed to him; while I possessed the fine estate of Deerhurst, valued at nearly ten thousand a-year; and besides this, I had more than fifty thousand pounds in money.

There was now, as you may imagine, no obstacle to

my marriage with Florence; but that astute young lady was too experienced to fall into the error of instantly agreeing to the proposal I at once renewed. Her manner was the same as ever—my increase of wealth did not appear to have affected her at all; and she affected to pity poor Maurice, and praised him so highly, as again to raise my jealousy.

But Mrs. Templeton, fearful least Florence should over-act her part, interfered on my behalf; and as they had engaged a small house at a watering-place, not very far from Deerhurst, she proposed that we should all quit town at once; and in the quiet and seclusion of the country Florence and I would have better opportunities of understanding each other than in the continual racket of town dissipations and amusements. One evidence of good feeling the spoilt beauty displayed on this occasion; I will mention it in her favour. She begged me not to mention our engagement to Maurice; saying, she hoped that absence would have its proverbial effect on the light heart of a sailor, and that among new friends and fresh scenes he would forget much that had gone before, and that no interruption might occur to our friendship and intimacy. To this I willingly agreed, for I, too, had dreaded to pain the warm heart of Maurice Vincent; and, for the present, all went on as though there was nothing between us—only once more the bright dream of the old days at Malta became a waking reality; and once more Florence and I rode through pleasant lanes, and lingered in dimly-lighted corners. Those wonderful eyes often sought mine, with a glance that sent the blood coursing through my veins; that little hand rested in my fond grasp, or made but faint and ineffectual attempts at withdrawal. Ah! Charley, when I recall those days,

those memories, no wonder I feel indignant and disgusted, and scorn the sex from which sprung such specimens as Florence and her mother.

For the present, I had gone on half-pay, scarcely knowing whether I should ever again join the army; but I liked my profession too well as yet entirely to abandon it.

At last I prevailed on Florence to consent that some arrangements should be made for our marriage; and we agreed that it should be announced to our friends, and that Maurice should also be informed of it. Florence said she would write to him herself.

And now I will tell you how it came to pass that my idol was shattered, my day-dream rudely dispelled, and I became the cold, cynical being that all believe me. I had a heart once, Charley—a very loving one it was; but I gave it into the keeping of another, and that other betrayed the trust.

I had been spending the evening in the company of my beautiful betrothed, who had worn her brightest smiles on the occasion, and cast me more deeply than ever under the spell of her fascinations. She had been more than usually compliant, had sung each lovely song I demanded, and listened with glowing cheek to my rapturous expressions of delight—we had been very happy.

I seldom sought her presence without some costly jewel or fanciful toy; for well I knew that the fair Florence by no means despised such tokens of my affection; and I was amply repaid by a glance of pleasure from her radiant eyes or a smile from her ruby lips; besides, I loved her all the better for this little feminine weakness, and was only too charmed that it was in my power to gratify her every passing fancy.

This evening I had taken her a particularly expen-

sive gift—a splendid set of emeralds and diamonds; the tint of the former stone being especially becoming to her dazzlingly fair skin.

I had fastened the necklet round her graceful throat, clasped the gorgeous bracelets on her white and rounded arms, and affixing a sparkling tiara to her forehead, I bade her survey herself in the mirror, and tell me if she were pleased with my selection. For a moment she gazed in delighted surprise on the lovely vision that met her eyes; no fair, young princess—the glory of a kingdom—was more beautiful than my Florence, and her red lips parted with a smile of triumph as she gazed on the image reflected in the glass; then turning to me, as I sat watching her, she rested her little hand on my shoulder, and whispered softly, "Dearest Percy! how can I ever repay such love, such munificence as this?"

I pressed her to my heart.

"Florence! love me well. It is all I ask!"

"Ah! Percy, I do," she replied; "I love you well; but how can I prove it? I wish you could become poor again: then I would cling to you in your misfortunes, and make you forget them in my love."

"And you would still love me, my darling? You could be happy as the wife of a poor man?"

"With you, Percy, I could be happy anywhere," she murmured, hiding her blushing face on my shoulder.

"Bless you, my own darling Florence! That sweet assurance is worth all the jewels in the Indian mines; you have well paid me for the diamonds I brought you. And now, give me that rosebud from your dress; it will be a solace to me during my lonely hours, and will remind me of you—if that were necessary."

"It is the last in the garden, Percy," she replied, unfastening it from her bosom as she spoke; "and, in the language of flowers, it means a confession of love; so it is very appropriate."

She placed it in my coat with her fair fingers; and I wound my arm round her slight figure, and drew her towards me.

Unwittingly she leant against the rosebud, and the fragile blossom became detached from the stem, and fell on the ground at our feet.

I picked it up, and said, with a smile, "Florence, if I were inclined to be superstitious, this is a bad omen; for, in the language of flowers, a rosebud broken from its stalk means separation."

"So it does," she replied; "but that is not very likely in our case; our separation will only last until to-morrow afternoon, when you come here to ride with me. And here, you shall have this to console you for your loss; it has a charming meaning, 'You occupy my thoughts;' surely nothing can exceed that!"

She bent over a vase of rare exotics that stood on a little table beside her, and, selecting a large purple heartsease from among the more brilliant flowers, she held it up to me with a bewitching smile. I took it from her and raised it to my lips; "It has, indeed, a charming meaning, Florence; may I really believe in its truth?"

"Infidel!" she replied, smiling gaily, "to dare for an instant to doubt me!" and, with one more fond embrace, we parted.

I returned to my solitary home, remembering in how short a time it would no longer be so—scarcely yet able to realize the unspeakable felicity contained

in the knowledge that Florence would then be all my own—ever with me—no more separations—no more doubts.

It was necessary that I should write one or two business letters that night, and I proceeded to do so. Having finished them, I glanced through some old papers that lay in the drawer of the escritoire at which I was writing.

The late owner of Deerhurst had always used this desk; and it was carefully and conveniently fitted up with shelves and drawers for all kinds of deeds and papers; but nearly all those had been removed on his death, as belonging more especially to his private affairs.

Having replaced the papers in a small drawer, I endeavoured to lock it, when I found that the key would not work properly. On examining it, I discovered that something behind the drawer prevented it from closing tightly; and stooping to see what the obstacle might be, I observed a folded piece of paper that had fallen out of its place and caused the obstruction.

I immediately drew it out of its concealment, and found it to be a large sheet of paper, enclosed in an envelope.

Glancing at the superscription, I read with feelings of surprise, not unmingled with anxiety, "The Last Will and Testament of Walter Lascelles, Esquire, of Deerhurst." What did this mean? What could it mean?

A strange presentiment of evil crept over me. I laid down the paper, and pressing my hand on my forehead I felt my heart beating loud and quickly.

I opened the paper, Charley; it was a stamped deed, signed and sealed; and contained a realization

of my worst fears. It bore a date later than the will which had constituted me the heir of Deerhurst. This little document stripped me of all my vast possessions. Maurice Vincent was now the rightful owner of Deerhurst, while ten thousand pounds were bestowed on me! It was a startling discovery for a man to make in the dead of night, when rather sleepy, and just about to retire to rest.

Very thoroughly awake now, I examined the paper; and, as far as my small experience of law went, it seemed to be all perfectly correct; but even had it been otherwise, I should have acted upon it; for it was clearly the last intentions of the testator, and, with me, such would have been sacred.

I will not deny, Charley, that there was a strange whirl in my brain, and hours passed while I sat musing on the reverse of fortune that had befallen me, and wondering if Florence—but there was treason in the very idea; I cast it instantly from my mind. I gazed on the paper in my hand, and smiled bitterly as I remembered what a talisman it was—how riches and honour would be the portion of its fortunate possessor; and then I glanced at the fire now burning low in the grate, and thought how in one minute it might feed that dying flame, and all traces of it be lost for ever. But this was a mere passing fancy; no power on earth would have tempted me to sully my honour with a stain like that. What were the loss of position and riches to the departure for ever of one's peace of mind and self-respect?

Carefully I refolded the precious document, and locking the escritoire, I sought my own room and threw myself on my bed, to think, not to sleep. This splendid mansion was no longer mine; for my own

sake I felt but little regret at this idea, but Florence! —to how different a home must I take her now!

True, she had said that with me she could be happy anywhere; but in spite of all I could do, uncomfortable feelings would intrude themselves, and I tossed about in feverish anxiety, wishing for morning, and yet dreading it; for that day would decide my fate, and that fate might be—I thought of the broken rosebud, and sighed heavily, heavily. Morning came, fresh and bright. I threw open my window, gazed long and earnestly on the beautiful park and its spreading forest-glades, where were scattered many groups of the graceful animals from which the estate took its name.

It was mine no longer; those charming rides cut in the leafy wilderness, where Florence and I had so often cantered in happy hours gone by, were now the property of another; that other I envied only for her sake; for I knew she loved the beautiful park of Deerhurst, and had been so pleased at the thought of being its mistress.

And now I must seek her and break the unwelcome intelligence. How I dreaded the interview! The first glance told her that something was wrong, and she besought me eagerly to tell her what it was. Tenderly I drew her into the deep recess of the curtained window, and throwing my arm round her slight waist, I gazed earnestly into her uplifted eyes, and said, in a voice which I vainly endeavoured to render steady,

"Florence, my own darling girl, do you remember our conversation last night?"

"Yes, Percy, quite well. But what do you mean? Why do you look at me so strangely? You frighten me, dearest."

I pressed her closer to my side; I grasped her little hand, and felt that mine was trembling violently

"Florence! you said you would love me even if I were poor!—you would be true to me in spite of everything!"

"Of course I did, dearest Percy, and of course I will. But why are you so strange this morning? I am really becoming uneasy; and you are not well, I am sure of it. You are quite pale, and your hand is cold and trembling. Has anything happened?" She laid her hand on my shoulder, and looked keenly into my half-averted eyes.

"Florence, my own love, something has happened! Nay, do not start, darling, it is nothing dreadful; only for you, my sweet one, I should not mind it much."

She gazed at me silently, but the colour deepened on her fair cheek, and her breathing was faint and quick.

"Florence, I am no longer the master of Deerhurst."

"Percy!—what—what can you mean?" She tried to smile, but it was a failure; the light had faded from her eye, and she looked pale and anxious.

"It is too true, my darling. I made the discovery last night after leaving you. I found another will—a later one; Maurice Vincent is the heir, not I."

"Maurice Vincent!"

"Yes, darling, he and I change places; he is now the wealthy proprietor, and I am once more a poor subaltern! But not *poor*, Florence; I have your love, and with that I shall ever feel rich."

Surprised, horrified, she doubtless was, and for a

moment her presence of mind fairly deserted her; she remained speechless, while a strange expression shone in her distended eyes, and a look was in her lovely countenance that I could not quite fathom.

Another instant, and she was herself again. God forgive me, Charley, but I firmly believe that in that moment of hesitation she had formed her plans for the future;—heart, she had none; but head, that she had in perfection; and she brought her talents to bear upon her present position. And now her two little hands are clasped upon my shoulder, her glorious eyes are raining volumes of love and pity into mine.

"Dear, dear Percy! I love you better than ever. My own darling, to think that loss of fortune would work any change in me! Yes, it will, it will; now I can indeed prove how well I love you; I shall form your happiness now, and not wealth and position."

"They never made me happy, my own love, you alone did that; but I valued them for your sake. I wished to surround my darling wife with every luxury her heart could desire."

"And now we shall be poor, Percy, but none the less happy for that; we shall be more to each other than might have been possible had we been very rich and magnificent."

"Wretch that I was to doubt you!" I exclaimed, folding her in an impassioned embrace; "Florence, darling Florence, my whole life shall be devoted to making you happy."

Long, long we talked together; the same old story over and over again;—blind devotion and confidence on one side, beguiling love and heartless perfidy on the other.

Mrs. Templeton did not interrupt us; she imagined we preferred a *tête-à-tête* to having the society of a third person; and on this occasion especially I was most truly thankful to be spared the sight of her astonishment and dismay.

I begged Florence to break the unwelcome intelligence to her in the best manner she could; and after a long and interesting conversation, in which we discussed many plans and prospects, I again bade her farewell, and quitted the house in a much happier frame of mind than I had entered it.

I am dwelling far too minutely on those passages in my history, Charley, but I wished you to understand this part of my life; it has exercised a lasting influence on my character. The rest shall be told much more shortly.

Soon after my important discovery I went to London, where I had a great deal of business to transact. My marriage was for the time postponed, and by Mrs. Templeton's desire it was still unannounced. Neither mother nor daughter had as yet hinted at such a thing as the dissolution of our engagement; their behaviour was exactly the same as usual; indeed, it was kinder and more affectionate; and I quitted Deerhurst most thoroughly deceived—fooled, Charley, "to the very top of my bent."

Maurice Vincent had gone on a yachting cruise with his friends, and the time of his return was quite uncertain. I made all the necessary arrangements for delivering over the property, and then I considered what I had better do myself.

It had been decided that I should rejoin the army; and, fortunately, just at this time a vacancy occurred in my old regiment, and I obtained the appoint-

ment. And now, Charley, for the turning point in my life.

A letter was brought to me one morning. It was from Mrs. Templeton. There was an enclosure from Florence; but a strange feeling of something being wrong induced me to read her mother's letter first.

There was a long preamble, and the whole composition was interlarded with protestations as false as they were sickening; but through it all I arrived at the conclusion, and that was, that Florence was mine no longer, our engagement was at an end!

Impossible to part with her idolized child; her delicate constitution unsuited to the roving life and many hardships that must be the lot of the careworn wife of a poor marching subaltern, &c., &c.

All speciously written and plausible enough, but all false, false.

Deerhurst and its broad acres had been my sole recommendation. Now they were mine no longer, and I was not the son-in-law she wished. Florence's letter was in a different strain. She was miserable, heart-broken—but what could she do? Her mother implored her to make this sacrifice. (Saerifice! how bitterly I laughed at the expression. The iron had entered into my soul, and already its work had commenced.) She was struggling with her inclinations, her heart divided between love and duty! Could she disobey her mother, who had done so much for her? But then to forsake me! There was agony in the thought! adding yet a fresh trial to those I had already so nobly encountered!

You were a clever girl, Florence! but on this occasion you went a little too far. I was not quite the fool you took me to be. Much anxious thought,

many discreet consultations had that letter cost you; and its fate was to be tossed in a transport of scorn and indignation to the far end of the room, and then picked up and flung into the blazing fire, stamped and crushed into it with the heel of my boot, till not a scrap, not a trace of it remained to exasperate me. From that hour I was an altered man. My eyes were opened; I saw the trap into which I had fallen, from which, thank Heaven! I had so barely escaped; and, Charley, I hated and despised all worldly and manœuvring women; I sickened at the thought of mixing in their society, and for the future I resolved to avoid them as I would the deadly shade of the upas-tree.

I must not omit to mention that Mrs. Templeton informed me of her intention of removing for a time from their present abode, to afford a change of scene to her darling child, she said, whose feelings were terribly shattered by all that had taken place. She implored me to forgive and forget all that was past, and trusted that when Florence and I had in some measure recovered our tranquillity, we might again meet as cousins and friends; till then it was better we should not attempt an interview. Nothing of what had occurred should ever transpire from them, she assured me; and for my own sake, and on account of Florence, it were wiser that I should be equally reserved. How I scorned them both, for their meaning was as plainly revealed to me as if they had written it; but I complied with all their requests. I collected all the letters that had been my most valued treasures, a lock of her beautiful fair hair, a few trifling gifts she had bestowed on me; I made them into a parcel, and I enclosed them to her without one word of regret or remonstrance. In the same manner I received

mine; and then I knew that the last link that bound me to Florence Templeton was snapped—my happy dream of love and truth was over.

A little time passed. My regiment was still abroad, and I remained with it, thankful for anything that kept me from England, and for any occupation to relieve the dark tenor of my thoughts.

Then came strange news.

Maurice Vincent and I had ever remained friends; the change in our relative positions had in no way affected our good understanding, though I had refused to agree to his proposal of sharing the property between us, or even to accept anything from him except the sum to which I was entitled by the will.

But never had I breathed to him the waking of that sweet time of love, nor the destruction of all my hopes. Sympathy in all its forms was ever distasteful to me, and I preferred locking my secret in the recesses of my own heart.

And now he wrote that he was going to be married, and that his bride was Florence Templeton!

He wrote in such a proud, happy strain; she was so beautiful, so good—it seemed almost too great happiness—he could never, never be worthy of the love of one so far beyond what he deserved.

I scarcely know what were my first sensations on reading his letter, the joyous outpourings of a young, happy spirit, uncrushed by care or sorrow. To let him marry her—so false, so worldly, so utterly unworthy of the love of his fresh, honest heart—could I be silent and suffer this? Then I reflected that he loved her, had done so for long; and should I make him undergo the same torture that had well-nigh maddened me! She might make him happy; it was trial

that had developed the worst side of her character; in prosperity there might be no such risk. She might be the sunshine of his home; of her real disposition he might ever remain in ignorance.

Only for him I doubted, never did I cast a thought on her; she was as nothing to me now. So I wrote and *congratulated* Maurice, and he never suspected the agony that letter cost me, for it opened all my old wounds afresh; and then I knew that in spite of all her falsehood, all her treachery, Florence Templeton had not yet lost her old dominion in my heart—I loved her—I loved her still.

Then Maurice begged that I would be present at his marriage, that I would act as his friend on the occasion; and I agreed to do so!

I arrived the evening before the ceremony, which was to take place in London; Maurice insisted that I should go at once and see the Templetons, who were anxiously expecting me; and as I had made up my mind to go through all without flinching, I accompanied him; only stopping at a jeweller's by the way, that I might select a handsome present for the bride.

I chose an emerald and diamond bracelet, something similar to those I had once before given her; and I sighed as I thought of the difference in my feelings then and now. Some relations were staying with the Templetons—one or two pretty young bridesmaids, and two or three other people.

Mrs. Templeton looked red and confused as she shook hands with me and welcomed me back to England; Florence was not in the room, and I felt for the moment relieved. Presently there came a message that she wished to see me in her boudoir, and I fol-

lowed Mrs. Templeton thither, as she said she would show me the way.

She stopped at the top of the staircase, and said hurriedly, "Florence is much upset at the prospect of this interview, Percy; but I assured her that you were much too kind and generous needlessly to pain her feelings now. I trust that the past is now a forgotten thing, and that we shall all be good friends for the future. God knows, I did all for the best." And she raised her laced pocket-handkerchief to her dry eyes, and affected to wipe away a tear that had no existence.

"You certainly did, Mrs. Templeton," I replied, drily; "and it has proved for the best in the end, which is not always the case with our plans."

"Dear child!" murmured the affectionate mother, "she is so attached to Maurice, it would break her heart were they to be parted."

"I have no doubt of it," I replied. "Your daughter has a very accommodating heart, Mrs. Templeton; were I to announce myself once more the owner of Deerhurst, I feel positive that early associations would prove too strong for her, and that even at the last hour she would discover she had mistaken the nature of her regard for Maurice—her attachment for her old lover would resume its former sway." I spoke bitterly, and gave a mocking laugh as I concluded.

"Do you mean to insult me, Mr. Lascelles?" she asked, in an angry tone.

"Far from it, my dear madam," I replied. "We know each other too well for that. I only wish you to understand that you need not try any of these little *ruses* upon me; I have the advantage of being behind the scenes, you know, so you are only wasting time."

She bit her lips, but ventured on no answer; then, opening a door a little way down the passage, she said—"Florence, here is Percy Lascelles." And then she returned to the party downstairs, leaving me alone with my cousin.

She had been writing, and she rose hastily, and pushed the table aside, as with a deep blush she advanced to meet me.

She was greatly embarrassed, and her greeting was nervous and confused; but I pretended not to see it, and led her to a sofa, on which we both seated ourselves. How lovely she looked! I felt my heart beating wildly, and the blood mounting to my throbbing brain; but I had resolved that no triumph should now be hers, and by a superhuman effort I stilled my bounding pulses, and spoke in a tone of calm and passionless indifference.

"How beautiful you are, Florence! more so than ever, I think. What a charming bride you will make! Remember, the first kiss is mine, by right of my office."

"Percy!" she uttered, faintly.

"Oh, I did not mean to shock you!" I replied. "But it is strictly *selon les règles*, you know. And see, I have brought you a votive offering." I opened the little case, and took from it the emerald bracelet. "I have a good memory, you perceive, Florence," I remarked, with a gay laugh; "I have not forgotten your old *penchant* for emeralds."

"Cruel! cruel!" she murmured, covering her eyes with her hand.

"My dear Florence, what can you mean?" I exclaimed, affecting great amazement. "Surely you cannot be alluding to what took place so long ago as

last year! That is an old story now! Why, we have both had a dozen *affaires du cœur* since then; all as desperate as that was, I have no doubt, and quite as sincere. Come, let me clasp this bracelet on your arm; it will look charming with your pink dress, and you shall wear it downstairs, and receive public opinion upon it. Once on a time I flattered myself I had a very good taste in jewels; but it has not been much exercised of late."

She saw the footing on which I was resolved that our intercourse should now be placed, and she accepted it.

A few more indifferent sentences, and we descended to the drawing-room, where I was introduced to the rest of the party, and my bridal-gift discussed and admired. Florence was pale, and rather abstracted in her manner; but it escaped notice, or was only attributed to her position on the eve of quitting for ever the fostering care and affection of her mother. There was too large a party for the possibility of any marked demonstrations of attachment from Maurice, who was far too gentlemanly to attempt anything of the kind in the presence of others; so nothing of this nature occurred to jar my feelings—it would have driven me mad to have witnessed their tenderness.

But when we left the house, how he raved of her beauty and all her delightful qualities; and I listened to his raptures, and thought how short a time it was since I too had felt the same.

"I dare say I bore you, Percy," he remarked, with a happy laugh; "but lovers are proverbially egotistical, and some fine day you will be in the same scrape, and will be just as foolish as I am. Do you know, I was formerly rather jealous of you; Florence

and you were such very good friends, and you had so many opportunities of being with her. I sometimes wonder how it was that you did not fall in love with her."

"There is a fate in these things," I replied, as gaily as I could; "besides, Florence never cared for me, so you had no cause for jealousy."

"Just as well," he said, cheerfully. "I should not have liked you for a rival, Percy; I fear Mr. Maurice Vincent would have gone to the wall in that case. And, had we both loved her, we might have quarrelled; and I should have been so grieved to have lost your friendship and her love—perhaps both. Now I *have* both, and not a sorrow in life. I almost feel too happy!"

Who would be the one to wake him from a dream like this? Not I.

"Long may such happiness continue, my dear Maurice," I replied; "we have ever been fast friends, and no light cause shall divide us now."

"None, indeed, Percy," he exclaimed warmly, wringing my hand energetically as he spoke.

The morrow came.

I accompanied Maurice to church. I saw her who had been the light of my eyes and the life of my soul in all the radiance of her snowy bridal dress—the soft veil shading, but not concealing, her lovely features. I saw her made his wife. I heard the solemn words that raised an eternal barrier between us. I saw it, heard it all; but never for one moment did the smile forsake my lip, or the shadow gather on my brow: and when the blushing, newly made wife turned from the altar, and prepared to receive the congratulations of her relatives, I was the first to

offer her words of greeting; and as I pressed my lips calmly on her fair forehead, I said, in a tone of cordial satisfaction, "Mrs. Vincent, allow me to be the first to wish you joy!"

They went abroad for some time, and I returned to my regiment. It was now in the West Indies, and I went there, but only for a few months; my health failed me, and I was sent home.

The depôt of the 144th was then stationed at a town only a few miles from Deerhurst; and I had a warm invitation from Maurice to come there as often, and stay as long as I could. He was still as happy as ever, he said—nay, happier; for there was the prospect of an heir to the estate, and he kindly said that he knew I was too unselfish not to rejoice with him, even at what was so injurious to my own interests. Having assured him on this point, I promised to visit him whenever I could; but first I must go to my own home, and rejoice in the love I now prized most on earth, that of my dear young brother. His true, unselfish affection was my only solace, and in his society I forgot much that had tried me sorely; for a time I was tranquil, and almost cheerful; I would not cast a shadow on his careless happiness, and had I looked sad, it would have grieved his affectionate heart. By and bye I rejoined the depôt, and then Maurice begged me to go to Deerhurst. A refusal would only have pained him, and afforded a triumph to the heartless Florence, so I went.

If adversity had developed the worst portions of Florence's character, prosperity had certainly not improved her. She was colder, more arrogant than formerly; and I did not think that she valued the treasure of such a heart as her husband's so warmly

as she ought. Her love of admiration was as strong as ever—I saw that on many occasions; and, Charley, she tried to resume her old power over my heart—she, the wife of another, and that other such a man as Maurice.

I had always treated her with calm politeness, but with a manner that forbade all attempt at confidence; but I gradually awoke to the perception that Florence was trying to break down the barrier between us, and I determined to raise it again more firmly than ever; never should she be aught to me but my cousin's wife. I should scorn myself, could I dream of a revival of our old affection.

The day was cold and rainy. I was staying at Deerhurst, and had taken refuge in the library. There was no inducement to go out, and Maurice had gone to some road-meeting, and would be absent until dinner-time.

I was busily engaged in reading, when the door was gently opened, and Florence entered the room.

"Are you here alone, Percy?" she inquired. "Are you not dull?"

"No," I replied, drily. "I have a very interesting book."

"That is not at all a civil hint," she observed, in a jesting tone; "so I shall not take it. I am dull if you are not."

She sighed as she spoke, and seating herself on a stool beside the fire, she bent her head on her hand, and for a long time she remained quite silent, only gazing earnestly into the glowing embers.

I pretended again to be reading; but over the page I glanced at her as she sat there, and for some time I watched her in her deep reverie.

She was exquisitely dressed; every appliance of wealth and taste was around her; delicate lace shaded her fair throat, and costly rings decked her taper fingers and glittered in the flickering firelight; and there, too, shone the little golden circlet that divided her from me, and reminded me of my duty, as it should have done her of hers. I withdrew my eyes from her too dangerous beauty, and tried to fix my attention on the volume before me; but it might as well have been upside down—I saw and understood not one word. Then she spoke.

"Percy! Do you know what day this is?"

Her voice was low and trembling, and it stirred every pulse into wild commotion. Those melting tones—ah! how well I recollected them!

I replied, in a calm, stern voice, "I remember it perfectly, Florence; it is the anniversary of the day on which I lost Deerhurst, and you beguiled me into believing you noble and true."

"Oh, Percy! do not speak so harshly. If you knew what I suffered in giving you up. I loved you so dearly; but mamma would not hear of it, and I was forced to comply with her wishes."

"Florence, do not say this—do not attempt to deceive me now. My eyes have long been opened to your real character, and I know you to be false as you are beautiful."

"Oh, Percy! spare me," she cried, clasping her hands together.

"I should respect you more, Florence, if you owned that it was my position and riches you valued; and that when they were gone, then you no longer cared for me. Degrading as it is, the truth is better

than the false excuses you now offer me. I am not blind now—that dream is over long ago !"

"These reproaches are very hard to bear," she replied, in a choking voice; "but I deserve them, Percy, and they are not more bitter than the upbraidings of my own heart. Ah ! Percy, you may not believe me, but for one hour of those old times, I would give up all my riches willingly—oh, so willingly ! Would it were only possible !"

The temptation was too frightful. I rose hurriedly from my chair, and paced the room in violent agitation. Should the beautiful sorceress be victorious, after all ? Should I once more fall a prey to her artful machinations ? Should I again listen to her honeyed words, and believe the delusive tale they would whisper to my twice-betrayed heart ? And then came the remembrance of her fond, trusting husband; but that he loved her, I would even now have unmasked her treachery.

But never, by word or deed of mine, should I grieve the noble heart of Maurice Vincent. The temptation might be great—almost irresistible—nevertheless, it should be resisted, and overcome.

I was calm now, and I approached the place where she was sitting—where she had watched the tumult that had arisen in my soul, and pondered over the chances that she should conquer in the end.

"Florence," I said, in a deep, concentrated voice, "for some reason, best known to yourself, you have chosen to allude to times and scenes that caused me pain so exquisite that I can never endure to recal them. Let them be buried in oblivion; it is all you can do for me now. On that condition alone shall we

remain even outward friends—more we can never, shall never be."

"Oh, Percy, do not say this! I cannot bear this cruel estrangement—from you—who loved me once so well!" She covered her face with her hands, and bent it down almost to her knees.

"The estrangement was of your own making, Mrs. Vincent," I replied, coldly. "You say truly, I *once* loved you well; but that time is past now."

"Percy! you will kill me by your cruelty. Look, I will kneel to you!" And she threw herself suddenly before me, and her long fair curls were scattered over my feet and on the ground. "Will you not forgive me now, when my pride is brought so low? No, I will not rise till you tell me that I am forgiven—that you do not hate me; that I have still a place in your heart. Oh, Percy, say that you love me still!"

Oh, Charley, pray that you may never be exposed to struggle with a temptation so terrible as this! I could have raised her in my arms, and clasped her to my wildly-beating heart, and told her that never had she been forgotten for one moment; that she was even now idolized beyond her utmost desires.

Had I even now believed her true, I might have been still more fearfully tried than I was; but with the reflection of a moment came the remembrance that this was all acting—good, wonderful acting, no doubt of that, but still it was acting. Florence never had loved me—did not love me now; and in her present impassioned appeal to my heart and feelings, she sought but the gratification of her selfish vanity, nothing more. Coldly I met the agonized glance of her uplifted eyes. I had steeled my heart to with-

stand her utmost fascination; but I well knew that never again would she look on me as she did at that moment. A deadly and bitter enemy would she be from that hour; for she would know herself to be scorned by one who had once worshipped her every word and action. The heart in which her image was once so fondly enshrined, had now cast her out, indignantly and contemptuously; and, to a woman like her, this was galling beyond all endurance—a mortification like this could never be forgiven.

"Florence, rise, I beseech you," I said, in a tone of calm indifference. "Such excitement as this is both foolish and wrong. I have told you that the past is nothing to us now; the remembrance of it must never be recalled. You are the wife of my best friend, in no other light shall I ever consider you. The time was, that the words you have now uttered would have brought me to your feet in abject slavery; but you can never again deceive me, for I know you now, Florence, and from my heart I despise you."

"Percy!" she fiercely exclaimed.

"Yes, Florence, it is true what I say. You may be indignant if you will, but I care not what you think of me; those who have once deceived me, can never again be trusted or loved; they shall never deceive me a second time. Think not that I am the dupe of your honeyed words, your beguiling manner; I know that it is all false. I can read that heart of yours as though it lay open before me; no love, no sorrow is there, but mean, despicable vanity—the vanity that would seek to renew the sufferings of which you were before the unworthy cause!"

I was excited now, Charley, and I spoke more bitterly than I should have done had time been given me

for reflection; but I was ever hasty and passionate, and when I looked on that woman, and thought of all her conduct to me, no feeling was in my heart but fierce and ungovernable indignation.

White and shivering she rose from her kneeling attitude, and drew herself to her full height.

"Percy Lascelles," she replied, in a voice so strangely altered that I should scarcely have known it to be hers, "you have wronged me. I did love you, fondly, passionately; I loved you as I *hate* you now; for the words you have just spoken shall never be effaced from my heart."

"I have no desire that they should," I answered, coldly.

"They shall not," she replied; "never again shall I force those unwelcome memories upon you; never shall I forget that you now *despise* me!"

She uttered the last words from between her closed teeth; the expression of her countenance was very frightful to see; then with a low and ceremonious bend of her haughty head, she drew her scarf closely round her shoulders, and with a slow and stately step she turned away and quitted the apartment.

For a long time I remained there, musing and perplexed.

Had she ever really loved me? Was she unhappy now?

How should we meet for the future?

A bitter enemy I knew she must be; but would she still wear the mask of outward civility, and to deceive her unconscious husband would she continue to treat me as before? We should see.

The noise of my cousin's arrival interrupted my meditations; and unwilling to meet him in my present

uncertainty, I hastily escaped to my own room, and only descended when the gong had sounded for dinner. He and Florence were both in the drawing-room; she charmingly dressed, looking most lovely, with the glow of her fierce excitement yet lingering in her cheek and lighting up her brilliant eyes.

"*Toujours prêt* is certainly not your motto, Percy!" she said gaily, as I joined them. "I have been telling Maurice how unsociable you were, moping among the musty volumes in the library; and then, when I invaded your seclusion, effecting a skilful retreat to your own sanctum."

The servant threw open the door as she spoke; and making some totally incoherent reply, I offered her my arm, and we proceeded to the dining-room.

What an actress she was!

Never had I seen her more gay, more fascinating; her lip wreathed with smiles, her eyes sparkling with mirth and pleasure!

One would have thought she and I had effected a heartfelt reconciliation that morning, instead of beginning an enmity that should cease only with our lives.

Maurice was surprised at her gaiety, and said, laughing, "Why, Florence, you are quite dazzling to-night; a perfect coruscation of wit and beauty!"

"My spirits have been so repressed all day," she replied, "that I suppose they are running into excess now."

But before night her countenance told another tale; she had overacted her part, and the reaction was terrible, as her ghastly, careworn look betrayed; and complaining of fatigue, she retired early, and did not make her appearance before my departure next day.

I must hasten to an end now; there is but little more to tell.

A month after this I was again at Deerhurst.

Maurice and I had been shooting in the preserves near the house; and as we were returning homewards we met Mrs. Vincent, who was strolling along through one of the green alleys.

There was a seat close to the place where we met; only two could find room on it, and I selected a fallen trunk of a tree just beside it, while Florence occupied the seat with her husband beside her.

I placed my gun against the trunk on which I was sitting; Maurice rested his against his knee, holding it at the same time.

"Maurice, you are far too careless with firearms," I observed. "Do put it somewhere else. I wonder Florence allows you to keep it there; ladies are generally so timid about guns, even when they are not loaded."

Perhaps she was nettled at my remark, or perhaps she was resolved to act on no suggestion of mine; she only remarked, "I have no fear of the kind with Maurice, and I think he is very careful, especially with me."

She looked brightly into his face as she spoke; and he turned his head to meet her affectionate glance.

How shall I describe what followed?

The seat was old and rotten; one of its frail supports at this moment gave way. Florence fell, the gun was slipping against her, its muzzle pointing right at her head. I dashed forward to catch it, but Maurice, even in falling himself, strove to save her; and reaching out his hand he seized the gun and pulled it to himself. There was a loud report—a cloud of white

smoke, and Maurice Vincent lay on the turf before me, bleeding—dying.

Forgetting her, forgetting everything but that the friend of my whole life was dying before my eyes, I threw myself on the ground beside him, clasped his weak hand in mine, and gazed into those kind eyes, over which the mist of death was already stealing.

His wife's screams, loud, wild, and prolonged, brought a keeper and some woodcutters to our aid; and with their assistance he was raised and carried to the house, while the doctor was speedily summoned, but only to shake his head, and look the sorrow he could not tell us.

Maurice was lying in a faint state, his eyes closed, death written in every pallid feature.

Florence thought he was dead, and flinging herself wildly beside him, she screamed in accents of frenzied despair, "He is dead!—he is dead!—and it was you, Percy, who killed him! You always hated him for supplanting you, and you have killed him now! Oh, Maurice! Maurice!"

With a look of indignant horror I gazed on her. "You are mad, Florence! You do not know what you say."

"I am not mad," she replied, violently; "and I say it was you who killed him. You fired that gun!"

"Florence! my own Florence! This is dreadful."

It was the faint voice of the dying Maurice; and a hush fell on us all. Silently we gathered round him.

"My dear, dear wife, grief has distracted your imagination; you never mean what you said just now. Forgive her, Percy; never think again of what she said in her first wild sorrow; it is a sore trial for one

so young and so happy as she has been. And now all of you listen to me, and believe that I speak the solemn truth. Before many minutes I shall be called to the bar of everlasting judgment; do you think I could appear there with a falsehood in my latest breath? My cousin had no more to do with the firing of that gun than any of you had; it was entirely an accident, partly caused by my own carelessness, but still only an accident. This is the sacred truth, on the word of a dying man. I would not say so much, only my last moments would be truly wretched if I thought that the shadow of a doubt rested on Percy Lascelles, my best, my dearest friend, the only brother I have ever known."

He spoke slowly and with much difficulty, and every now and then he paused, and a spasm of inward pain crossed his pale features.

I knelt beside him, and clasped the hand he extended to me; his other arm encircled his fainting wife, on whom he cast looks of more than mortal affection.

"Percy, be her friend," he murmured. "Be the protector of my unborn child. It can never know the love or the care of a father; but you will supply my place."

"I will, Maurice; most faithfully do I promise you this."

"Thanks, dear Percy; I knew I could rely on you. Florence, my darling wife! look up once more! Let me see your beloved face again before my eyes are closed in death. My darling, my darling, try and calm this bitter sorrow; it is adding yet another pang to those I already feel at leaving you."

Fainter and fainter he grew, the end was fast approaching; he was too feeble for speech now, but

every moment he opened his dim eyes and gave a look of unutterable love at Florence and myself.

Gradually he sank; we scarcely knew the moment in which his noble spirit departed. His last words were, "Percy! dear Percy! My own Florence!" and then there was a long, long pause, an anxious, unbroken silence, till the sad truth fell on our sorrowing hearts, that he was gone!

Dreadful was the scene that followed, as Florence, in a paroxysm of wild frenzy, was torn shrieking from the corpse of her husband, and carried to another room, where the proper restoratives were applied. I heard her wild ravings die away in the distance. "He killed him, he knows he did; he hated him, and this is his revenge." But I heeded her not; my eyes were fixed on that rigid form, my ears were yet listening to his last parting words. One short hour ago he was full of life and health, and now, there he lay, so cold, so motionless; that generous heart for ever stilled; one hour, one little hour had done it all.

Florence and I did not meet again. I only remained at Deerhurst till after the funeral, and she never quitted her own apartment.

The estate of Deerhurst became mine if Mrs. Vincent's child should prove a girl; but if she gave birth to a boy, he would of course succeed to everything.

How I prayed it might be the latter, that I might never hear more of the abhorred subject; but I was disappointed. It was a girl, and once more I was the master of Deerhurst. I loathed the very idea of it. Never should I marry now; no child of mine would ever inherit those broad acres; wealth and station were not of the slightest importance to me.

Had my young brother lived, I might have hesitated

on his account; but just at this time he too was taken from me; and then I executed a deed in which the entire possessions of my cousin Maurice were secured to his daughter. She would succeed when she came of age, exactly as though it were her rightful inheritance; and during her long minority her wealth was to accumulate in the usual manner. From that time forward I had neither share nor interest in anything that concerned it.

This has been a long, weary story, Charley, though your face of interest has encouraged me to go more into detail than I should otherwise have done; but now that you have heard it all, you can better understand the dark side of my character.

Much and varied experience has been mine; in my prosperous days I knew well what it was to be flattered and worshipped by those who value the idol for its gilding, and look at nothing beyond; but my particular weakness did not lie in this direction. I was not much elated by the caresses of fortune, and so her frowns did not afflict me as they might many others.

It is a queer world, my dear boy, but in it there is both good and bad. May your experience of it be more fortunate than mine. And now we have finished this dreary subject, let us never recur to it again. You will easily imagine it is far from a pleasurable one."

He lighted a fresh cigar as he concluded, and I followed his example.

He still leant over the side of the vessel, apparently watching its progress through the yielding waves; while I paced up and down the deck, and meditated profoundly on all I had just heard.

"It is a glorious night," he observed, as I passed close to him, "or rather it must be morning now. But come, you look pale and sleepy; late hours are trying to young heads, we had better go below."

And then he threw away the end of his cigar, and we turned and prepared to seek our cabins.

## CHAPTER V.

### A FIRE AT SEA.

We were just about to descend the cabin stairs.

There was not much wind, only a gentle breeze; but as we opened the cabin door and were on the point of entering, there came a passing gust full in our faces; it came from the after-deck towards the place where we stood, and I fancied I could detect a faint smell as of something on fire.

Percy perceived it too, for he turned round quickly, and said, "Charley, something is burning; don't you smell it?"

"Yes," I replied; "very strong."

At that moment there came another puff of wind, bringing an unmistakeable odour of burning wood.

"We must see what it is," he observed, hastily. "It may be nothing of consequence, but it is as well to be certain that all is right; a ship on fire in the wide ocean is no trifling matter."

He hurried to the after-deck, and I followed him.

The burning odour grew stronger as we proceeded, and an odd uncomfortable feeling that there was something wrong took possession of my mind.

Two sailors were speaking in a low tone, doubt and hesitation expressed in their manner.

Percy instantly went up to them.

"There is a strong smell of burning; do you know what it is?"

"No, sir," replied one of the men. "We have just noticed it, and are going to look where it comes from."

"Do it at once; I will go with you; but be very cautious; alarm no one."

We examined the various decks and sleeping-places, but there was nothing wrong. At last we decided that it was in the hold, and were soon convinced that our suspicions were correct. The burning smell was now very strong, no further time must be lost. God help us if we were already too late!

I felt very eager and excited, but Percy was as calm as ever; speaking in his clear measured voice, and giving every order in the coolest and most distinct manner.

"Go and tell the captain," he said to one of the sailors; "but take care that you do not spread an alarm. It is better to say nothing for a little. Rouse the crew at once, I will summon my men."

We returned to the cabin of the sleeping soldiers, nearly all of whom were buried in profound repose but one or two looked up as we entered, and said: "What is it, captain?"

"Soldiers!" he said, in a clear sharp voice; and more than half of the men were awake on the instant, sitting up in their berths, and looking fixedly at him.

"Soldiers! rise immediately, and lose no time in assembling on deck. Your services are required; great haste, but no confusion; see that every man is present, not one must remain behind."

They were rising as he spoke, and putting on their clothes as rapidly as possible.

"The women and children must get ready too, instantly; but they will remain here until they are called on deck. Mr. Nugent, will you see those orders carried out; I will return immediately."

He darted up the narrow stair, and I remained behind.

"For God's sake, what is the matter, sir?" asked one of the sergeants in a low tone. "Is it fire?"

"I trust it is nothing serious, Barclay," I replied, also in an under-tone; "but there is a strong smell of fire, and it is better to be prepared."

"The Lord have mercy on us," he said seriously; and then he proceeded to hasten the operations of the men. At this moment wild and frightful screaming burst upon our ears, and then came the noise of feet hastily trampling on the deck, the loud passionate voices of excited men, the sharp commands of the captain, all mingled in terrible confusion: it was plain that the secret had transpired, and all were now aware of the danger that might be impending.

The next instant Lascelles rejoined us. "Come on deck, all of you," he exclaimed; "but listen to me first. The ship is on fire, but with steadiness and obedience all danger may be averted. Go quietly on deck, let there be no noise or confusion; every man to his own place, and instant obedience to every order that is given."

Silently the men quitted the cabin, and ascended to the deck.

"Oh, sir!" cried a young woman with an infant in her arms, "are we to be left here?"

"For the present," he replied; "but you shall not

be forgotten. You are better here than on deck ; only be ready to come the moment you are called."

It was a terrible scene.

Men and women, only partially dressed, were rushing frantically in every direction ; wild screams and despairing ejaculations sounded on all sides, while above all was heard the loud voice of the captain, and at intervals the deep-toned replies of the sailors.

Thick smoke was now issuing from the hold, telling to what an extent the fire had obtained the mastery. In the centre of the poop were assembled the collected body of soldiers ; silently and steadily they awaited their word of command, their military trappings glistening in the beams of the calm pale moon, that shone so placidly on this spectacle of horror and impending destruction.

Water was passed from hand to hand, and an attempt made to quench the fury of the destroying element, but it was all in vain ; the smoke increased in volume and density, and soon vivid tongues of flame leaped up from the burning hold, and cast a lurid glare on the awful scene.

At this appalling sight fresh screams broke from the terrified women, and a large body of both cabin and steerage passengers made a rush for the boats, of which there were four.

The first one they seized so roughly that the ropes broke by which it was suspended, and it fell into the water with its top upwards. Mingled groans and execrations followed this calamity, and a furious dash was made for the second one, which they succeeded in lowering into the water ; but so frantic was the rush to get into it, that the boat was instantly overloaded, and she sunk into the foaming waves, nearly all her

freight perishing along with her; only a few were sufficiently good swimmers to regain the side of the vessel and seize the ropes that were humanely extended to them.

Two boats alone remained! Some of the passengers were rushing to another, when Percy Lascelles dashed forward.

"No!" he exclaimed, decidedly; "this shall not be allowed. Not another boat shall be launched till I give the word. Soldiers! draw your bayonets and guard the boats. Let no one attempt to touch them till I return."

Soon he was back again, followed by the women and children belonging to the various corps; while in his arms he carried a sick soldier, who was too feeble to move, and would otherwise have been left behind.

"Now lower a boat," he said to the sailors. He had assumed the entire command; for when the captain saw how great was the danger, he became excited beyond all control, and was quite unable to give the necessary orders.

The boat was ready, and instantly an attempt was made again to appropriate it; but the soldiers stood firm, and with drawn bayonets kept off all invaders. Then Percy placed himself by the opening in the side of the vessel, and holding aloft a loaded pistol, he solemnly swore that he would shoot the first man who attempted to enter the boat without his permission.

One by one the women and children were carefully lowered into it; all went except the young bride I have before mentioned, and no entreaties could induce her to leave her husband. It was a distressing spectacle to witness the agonized grief of the terror-stricken women as they clasped their sobbing children in their

arms, and prepared to quit the deck of the burning vessel, compelled to leave those behind them who were dearer than life itself. Several of the soldiers' wives at first refused to go; but they at last obeyed the stern voice of Lascelles, who told them that by remaining behind they were only lessening their chance of safety, and adding to the danger of the rest, who might be enabled to struggle for life if they were perfectly free, but not if encumbered with women and children. And one by one the poor weeping creatures departed, till only Mrs. Malcolm was left; and she held her husband in a tight embrace, and murmured through her tears, "Do not ask me to leave you, Henry, for I will not do it; let us live or die together!" Then Percy caused the sick soldier to be placed in the boat, after which he permitted a certain number of the passengers to enter it, till his watchful eye perceived she was now sufficiently loaded.

"No more can be admitted now," he said, in a resolute tone, "except an officer to take the command of the whole party. Mr. Nugent, you will take charge of them, and remain near the vessel for the present. Go quickly," he continued, seeing I made no effort to obey him.

"It is no use, Percy," I muttered; "you need not desire me to go, for I am resolved to stay with you. Send some one else."

"Charley," he replied, gravely, "this is nonsense, and you must obey me. We may all be saved—I trust in God we shall; but it may be otherwise, and——"

"I shall share your fate, Percy, whatever it may be; nothing shall induce me to desert you. My mind is quite made up," I added in a determined manner;

"so say no more about it; you are only wasting time."

He wrung my hand in silence, and then glanced at the boat.

"The sea is pretty smooth; I think we may risk it. Captain Malcolm, will you take the command of this party, and then your wife can accompany you. Mr. Nugent will remain with his men."

This arrangement accordingly took place; and then the boat was pushed off from the side of the vessel.

The flames had by this time gained ground very rapidly; the after-deck was one blaze of fire, mingled with thick clouds of suffocating smoke, which the wind fortunately carried in the other direction; for the vessel's head had been turned the contrary way, and by this precaution the progress of the conflagration was in some measure stayed.

A murmur of hesitation was now distinctly heard, and the fatal truth arrived at. The last boat now remaining had been injured by an accident, and was not in a seaworthy condition.

Groans of horrified dismay burst from all assembled. Our last chance of self-preservation was cut off. Nothing now awaited us but certain death! And what a death!

The dawn was now slowly breaking, rendering distinctly visible a scene of horror, the recollection of which will never quit me to my dying day.

The after-deck was one mass of flame, which was steadily and surely gaining upon us, while streams of fire ran along the rigging and spars of the vessel, and over all was a cloud of dense smoke. The miserable passengers and crew ran hither and thither, with pale, scared faces. Some were on their knees wildly pray-

ing for mercy; others seemed in a stupor of despair; while a few, bolder than the rest, prepared to throw themselves overboard, a spar or some floating article clasped in their hands. Yes! it was an awful scene.

The cold gray ocean was all around us; not a rock or a sail in view. Only a little way from us was stationed the boat containing the poor women, their lamentable cries mingling with the shouts and groans of those on board the vessel, while above all was heard the loud crackling and roaring of the flames.

But still the little band of soldiers held their position unmoved; firm and composed they stood and beheld their last faint hope dying away; they had done all they could, rendered every assistance in their power, and now all that was left for them was to meet their fate like men.

I leant against the bulwarks, many sad thoughts passing through my mind. Percy was pacing up and down the deck, now gazing at the progress of the flames, and again sweeping the horizon with a large and powerful glass.

The heat from the fire was now very great, and every now and then a change of wind sent a fiery blast in our direction. Our fate was now fast approaching!

The men were very pale, but stern determination was written on each grave countenance. A few words Percy had addressed to them, bidding them die like British soldiers, no useless struggling or cowardly lamentations, but a brave resolve to meet their fate in such a manner as should cause their memory to be honoured by their fellow-soldiers and countrymen. A loud cheer was their sole response, and Percy knew that his command would be obeyed.

Minutes that were as years in duration passed by; and still the flames came fiercely on.

Percy gazed slowly and earnestly round the horizon; many times he had done so, but ever without the slightest change of countenance. But now he stopped, the glass in his hand trembled slightly, and a faint glow of suppressed emotion overspread his dark complexion. I watchéd him eagerly, and gleams of hope and anxiety shot from the questioning eyes of the men.

He called a sailor who stood at hand, and slinging the glass over his shoulders, he bade him climb to a higher position and look in the direction he pointed out.

The man did so at once; he poised the glass in his eager hands, but he trembled too much for a steady sight, and many anxious moments passed before he spoke. With straining eyes we watched his movements—with fast-beating pulses we listened for his first word!

"I see it!" he shouted. "It is a sail! Hurrah!"

A wild yell of frenzied joy burst from all who heard him, caught up again and yet again.

"Are you sure?" said Percy, calmly; "look again, my man."

"Yes, yes! It is a sail! coming this way; I see it quite plainly."

It was a sail! Far away yet—too far away, it might be, to help us in our extremity—but still there was hope, there was ecstasy in the contemplation of that distant white speck. We could all see it now; nearer it came and nearer, right in our direction, bearing down upon us. It was a steamer, and those on board

seemed to be aware of our situation, for we could see that every effort was being made to save us; it was coming on at a prodigious rate. We might yet be rescued!

But the flames were advancing too, oh! how rapidly —we should have a terrible struggle for life!

Now we were all huddled together in a corner of the deck, the fire rushing on at every side; but the steamer was plunging furiously through the yielding waves, and was now so near that we could distinguish the waving of white signals, tokens that every effort was being made on our behalf, encouragement to us to hold out to the last extremity.

We were saved! Every human being on board was saved; but before the last man gained the deck of the rescuing steamer our vessel was one sheet of raging flame; many of those who remained till the end having to quit her burning hull and hold on by ropes and spars till the boats came to their assistance.

The very last to go on board was Percy Lascelles; and it was chiefly owing to his cool determination and admirable management that no accident occurred, and all got off as safely as they did. The poor women and children were also received on board; and every kindness and attention was shown us by those who had succoured us.

We were conveyed to the place of our destination, and once more set foot on Irish soil; and I believe there were few on whom the events of that awful night did not make a lasting and salutary impression.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE.

A WEEK or two have elapsed, and Nelly is in Dublin. She has a small but charming cottage just beyond the town; and an elderly spinster, some distant connexion, has come to bear her company for a time. Her name is Miss Carew, an active, bustling little woman, very good-natured and kind-hearted, and she pets her young cousin amazingly, and thinks her the most beautiful and loveable creature ever seen; in which opinion I perfectly coincide with her, and vote her an uncommonly nice, sensible old lady, a regular model old maid. She and I are great friends too; and I fancy she has a glimmering of the relations between Nelly and myself, although the subject has never been mentioned to her; anyhow, she understands that I am on very intimate and privileged terms at the cottage, and she receives me accordingly.

Spring is now waning into the early summer; and the weather is very mild, and even warm. I spent a good deal of my time at the cottage the first few days after Nelly's arrival, and one day I remained to dinner; and in the evening we all sat near the open window

and enjoyed the pleasant breeze and the sweet perfume of the flowers in the parterre before us.

"How warm it is," said Lady Duneden, pushing her hair back from her temples; "quite oppressive."

Her bracelet caught in one of the long streamers of her widow's cap, and as she withdrew her hand the cap itself was pulled off her head and fell lightly on the ground. I picked it up and looked at it curiously. She blushed slightly and held out her hand for it; but I would not restore it.

"Oh, Nelly!" I exclaimed, "don't put it on again; you look ever so much nicer without it. You do indeed."

"Nonsense, Charley, give it me; I must put it on again."

"Oh! pray don't," I continued to urge her. "It's a regular sin for you to wear this hideous thing any longer. Now I see you without it, I shall never be able to endure the look of the frightful edifice again. Do, Miss Carew, help me to persuade her to give it up."

"Well, my dear," said the worthy spinster, "I really think Mr. Nugent is right; I am sure you have worn it long enough."

"Do you think so?" said Nelly, doubtfully. "I feel quite odd without it."

"You have worn it nearly two years," observed Miss Carew. "That is quite a sufficient time, especially for a young woman like you."

"There, Nelly!" I exclaimed, "you see Miss Carew agrees with me.

"'Sure how altered your air,
With that close cap you wear,

And the folds of your hair
That should be flowing free;
Be no longer a churl
Of its soft silken curl;
Ochone! widow Machree!'"

I waved the cap aloft in triumph as I concluded my ditty.

"You foolish boy," murmured the fair widow; "I never knew any one so absurd."

"Never mind what I am," I replied, "so long as you don't sport this frightful thing any more. Now you are your old self again, the very same Nelly O'Brien that ever you were; not an atom of change."

"Ah, Charley! there you are wrong. I am very much changed."

"Well, now I look at you, I daresay you *are* rather prettier; only I don't know that it was possible."

"Charley!"

"And certainly you are plumper than you used to be; I have no doubt that odious Mrs. Jennings half-starved you. She was capable of any wickedness."

"No, I can't accuse her of that," said Lady Duneden, laughing. "I had plenty to eat; but I should infinitely have preferred the 'dinner of herbs and love with it.'"

And in this way Lady Duneden was persuaded to abandon the badge of her widowhood.

Several visitors found her out in her seclusion; and among the first to renew their acquaintance with her were Colonel Grant and his kind-hearted little wife.

Most anxiously I longed to introduce Lascelles to her; but just at present it was impossible, as from his exertions during the fire he had received a severe

injury to his shoulder, and was for the time confined to barracks.

As was most justly his due, he had been overwhelmed with the praises and gratitude of those who were so deeply indebted to him; for I am firmly convinced that but for his decision and prompt maintenance of order, many would have lost their lives in the dreadful panic that prevailed on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

A very valuable testimonial was presented to him by those who had witnessed his admirable coolness and presence of mind. Nor was that heroic band of soldiers forgotten; they were welcomed and fêted in every direction, and their unrivalled obedience and discipline met with all the approbation they so thoroughly merited.

Even I was not overlooked, trifling as had been my services; and Lascelles laughingly remarked—

"I have a seasoned brain, Charley, and can stand a good deal of this sort of thing without being overcome; but your curly head will be turned altogether, if indeed the pretty widow has not done that ready to their hand!"

I need not say that of all the flatteries and praises I received, none were half so sweet to me as the sincere expressions of delight and thankfulness at my escape that fell from the lips of my darling Nelly.

Her eyes were distended and her fair cheeks pallid with horror as she made me recount each thrilling incident of that eventful night; and then hiding her blushing face on my shoulder, she softly whispered—

"And I was thinking of you all the time. I lay awake looking at that glorious moon, fancying that by its brilliant light your gallant vessel was speeding in safety across the channel. Ah! little did I imagine

the scene of horror on which her tranquil rays were shining!"

By my persuasions Nelly was induced to enter into society, which at first she was unwilling to do; but in the end I prevailed, and she accepted several invitations of an easy and social description. Among those was a small dinner-party at the Grants, in which Miss Carew and myself were included.

Mrs. Grant arranged it all during a morning visit which she paid to Lady Duneden, with whom I was sitting when she came.

"Of course I shall expect you, Mr. Nugent," she observed; "and I am going to write a pretty little note to your 'Orson,' and beg him also to favour us with his company. I find Lady Duneden is very desirous of meeting him; so I suppose you have been singing his praises like a devoted ally. Have you told her that he is immensely good-looking, and is a regular woman-hater?"

"As to his good looks," I replied, laughing, "Lady Duneden would not be a true woman if that had not been her very first question; but he does not hate women generally, Mrs. Grant. I am sure, without flattering you, nobody knows better than yourself that he does not hate you."

"Well, I believe I am a kind of an exception," she said, with a smile; "but really, Lady Duneden, I must have you see him; he is quite the 'lion' of the 144th, and a 'gentleman' in the most extended sense of the word; brave, noble, generous—a kind of Bayard, '*sans peur et sans reproche;*' and, as I said before, excessively handsome. '*Garde à vous,*' Charley," she added, glancing slily at me.

"With such praises as yours and Mr. Nugent's, I

may well be excused feeling rather curious to see this perfect '*héros de roman*,'" said Nelly, gaily; "but as yet I have been doomed to disappointment. Is he sufficiently recovered now to venture out?"

"He has not been out yet," replied Mrs. Grant; "but I attacked our old doctor this morning, and he said that by Tuesday the gallant Captain would be quite well enough to join us—his arm in a sling, of course, looking as interesting as possible. To be sure, we must 'first catch our hare' before we proceed to dress him; but he will be more than usually 'Orsonic' if he sends me an apology under the circumstances; for of course I shall let him know that you are to be with us—a very dangerous claimant for the throne of a certain young gentleman's friendship; unless, indeed, you contrive to effect an amicable arrangement, and reign week or month about; or, like the two kings of Siam, live in harmonious sovereignty at the same time."

We all laughed, and Nelly and I glanced merrily at each other.

"I hope you will succeed in inducing him to join your party, Mrs. Grant," I remarked; "you shall have my best assistance; but I can answer for his not appearing with his arm in a sling. Percy Lascelles is the very last person I know to come out in the 'interesting' line."

"Well, I believe you are right," replied Mrs. Grant; "your good-looking mentor has not many soft corners in his heart. I have made vast efforts to discover his special weakness, but all in vain; he is an unapproachable citadel of strong-mindedness. However, he has an amazing affection for you, no doubt of that; so perhaps you may manage to effect

an entrance where others fail. Prove your influence now, and bring him with you on Tuesday."

Lascelles declined dining at the Grants, as his shoulder still pained him a good deal, and he did not feel equal to the protracted duration of a long dinner; but being extremely desirous of an introduction to Lady Duneden, he promised to look in during the evening, which would answer equally well.

Nelly was quite amused at my extreme anxiety that she should look her best on this occasion; and promised me to bestow more than ordinary pains on her toilette.

I ransacked every garden in Dublin till I discovered some lovely crimson roses, a colour that would show to great advantage in her soft brown hair; and on the morning of the dinner I took them to her, an exquisite spray for her hair, and a no less beautiful cluster for her dress. I went betimes to Colonel Grant's, that I might be there when she arrived; and ere long the welcome announcement of "Lady Duneden and Miss Carew" sounded in my expectant ears.

It was a small party; two or three pleasant Dublin residents, Major Thompson, Colonel Fitzneville, and Major Lumley, of the 21st Hussars; Captain Lacy, and myself.

Nelly looked quite charming as she entered; I felt excessively proud of her graceful appearance, and was not surprised at the whispered comments on her beauty that met my ears, nor at overhearing Colonel Fitzneville remark pretty audibly to Major Lumley, "By Jove! what a pretty woman! Who the doose is she?"

"A rich widow, I believe," replied Lumley. "Now's your time, Colonel."

"Gad! she's worth looking after," rejoined the gallant Colonel, giving an extra twirl to his heavy moustache; "haven't seen her equal for many a day!"

He might well say that, and pay her no very high compliment either. She was, indeed, a beautiful creature. Her dress was some flowing, gauzy material, black, of course, but exquisitely made; displaying to the best advantage her lovely figure, and the dazzling fairness of her neck and arms. Her glossy hair, now for ever released from its muslin thraldom, was all drawn loosely to the back of her head; where it was gracefully knotted, and a few stray curls allowed to wander over her white shoulders. One spray of the crimson roses was lightly fastened among those drooping ringlets, the other relieved the dark corsage of her dress; and her sole ornaments were a pair of pearl bracelets and a little black enamel and diamond pendant in the form of a horseshoe, which was hung round her throat by a black velvet ribbon. It was a gift from myself one day when I had been laughing at all her "nonsensical superstitions," as I jokingly called them; and I begged her to wear it as an amulet to avert all harm from her, as a horseshoe has always been considered to have a certain portion of good luck attached to its possession.

She smiled, and accepted the little token; and from that hour I had never missed it from her neck.

I had no opportunity of exchanging more than a few words with her before dinner, as it was almost immediately announced; but I did contrive to whisper that her appearance surpassed my fondest anticipations, and I think I even hinted that she was an angel, or something of that kind; at which she

laughed merrily, and whispered in return that I was a "foolish boy."

Colonel Grant offered her his arm at this moment; and I was not particularly sorry that the necessity of Colonel Fitzneville having to perform a similar ceremony towards Mrs. Grant, compelled him to put the entire length of the table between himself and the fair widow; on whom, not having yet been introduced to her, he was leisurely bestowing most scrutinizing glances through his eye-glass; an employment in which cavalry officers do peculiarly excel, why or wherefore I know not, but such is the undoubted fact.

In the evening there were a few additions to the party, two or three young ladies and some of the other officers dropped in; and music, dancing, and flirting became the order of the night.

Colonel Fitzneville was introduced to Lady Duneden, and requested the honour of a quadrille with her; but she declined dancing, and he seated himself beside her in a small recess where there was a sofa out of the way of the dancers. Presently I saw Lascelles in the doorway.

I was engaged, and could not join him at once; and he stood there looking at all the young ladies in succession, evidently turning over in his mind which was the most likely to be Lady Duneden; for in her present position in the recess she was completely hidden from his sight.

There were two or three pretty young girls of the party, and he watched them all curiously; my own partner was a very handsome girl, but after one quick glance at her raven braids and brunette complexion, he passed on to others; but no one appeared precisely

to answer his idea of Nelly O'Brien, if she at all resembled the glowing descriptions to which he had so often patiently listened.

I saw his perplexity, and was amused at it.

The dance ended, I led my partner to a seat, and then I joined Lascelles in the doorway.

"Well, Percy!"

"I can't make her out at all, Charley. Which is she?"

"Which do you think, Percy?"

"I have not an idea. That was a nice girl you danced with; but she is dark. Now Lady Duneden is very fair."

"Try again."

"That little girl in pink, with the long curls? She is very pretty," he said, doubtfully.

"Percy! Nelly is a widow!"

"Oh! in black to be sure. But, my dear boy," and he scanned the four sides of the room rapidly, "there is nobody in black but that stout old lady on the sofa, and that bony-looking girl with the yellow flowers in her hair; and most certainly neither of these is Lady Duneden."

I put on rather a serious expression, and he gave a half-comic, half-uneasy glance at a very emaciated young spinster in the afore-mentioned costume; but this second examination re-assured him.

"Come now, Charley, this is not fair; you are chaffing me, you unmitigated little sinner that you are. She is not here."

"I give you my word she is," I replied; "in this very room."

"Then it must be the stout party on the sofa," he said, laughing; "for that very angular young female

won't do at all. I won't receive her into my fraternal regard. Stay!—I have it!—she is in the recess. I quite forgot that view of the case."

He walked hastily across the room, and gave a rapid glance at the occupants of the recess; I watching him eagerly all the time.

I saw him start—change colour—give one long, lingering, and to me most inexplicable look at the pair; and then he returned with slow, reluctant steps to the place where I stood awaiting him; but though I anxiously listened for his first words, he gazed steadily on the ground, and not one syllable did he speak. I was utterly amazed.

"Percy!" I said, in astonishment; "why don't you speak? What do you think of her?"

"She is beautiful!" he slowly observed, "very, very beautiful. I have seen her—before—Charley."

"When?" I exclaimed; "impossible! I should have heard of it."

"I did not know her name. I met her casually—a mere passing acquaintance."

"It is very odd," I soliloquized; "how have I never known it before? Did she not know your name either, Percy?" I looked at him suspiciously as I spoke.

"She did not—of that I am positive," he replied.

"But, Percy, why do you look and speak so strangely? I don't quite understand all this."

"The truth is, Charley," he replied, "there was some slight awkwardness attending our meeting. Any explanation you may wish will come better from herself—there is nothing to conceal—nothing she need mind telling you—only——"

"Mr. Nugent," said Mrs. Grant, laying her hand

lightly on my arm, "I have just carried off Colonel Fitzneville, and the coast is clear for your introduction. Make haste, or some one else will take the vacant seat."

"Come, then, Percy," I said, in a mechanical sort of way; I scarcely know what I thought or feared.

Silently he followed me.

She was bending over a little King Charles's spaniel of Mrs. Grant's, that had wandered into the room, and did not see us until roused by my voice—

"Nelly, this is Captain Lascelles."

Quickly she raised her head; something in the tone of my voice made her look at me curiously for a moment, and then she glanced in the direction of Percy Lascelles.

An irrepressible start—a sudden gasp, as if for breath—the sweet, calm expression instantly changed to one of distress and painful confusion—the long, drooping lashes timidly lowered on the crimson cheek—while her fair brow, throat, neck, all were dyed in one vivid, burning blush—what could it all mean?

I stood paralysed, looking from one to the other in painful hesitation. Then I spoke—

"Percy! Nelly! what mystery is this? Tell me—now. When did you meet each other? Where?"

"Not now," she murmured; "not now, Charley. I will explain it all afterwards."

"But he looks very uncomfortable, poor fellow," said Percy, kindly; "let me just set his mind at ease. I told you, Charley, that there was some slight awkwardness attending my meeting with Lady Duneden; what it was she will tell you herself. This is all; now are you satisfied? Come, put off that lugubrious expression of countenance; I assure you there is

nothing that need annoy you; and, surely, you can trust me. You know me well enough."

"I do, I do," I replied, eagerly; "forgive me, Percy, that I doubted you for a moment. It all came upon me so suddenly. Now, I shall leave you both to have a chat; and remember, you must make a clean breast of it by and by."

I went back and joined the dancers, leaving them sitting together; and as an expiation for my ungrounded suspicions, I would not cast a single glance in their direction; but permitted them to converse without scrutiny or restraint. But I could not help thinking—a little—no, a good deal; and the result of my cogitations was, that in the course of the evening I stole behind Lady Duneden's chair when she had once more joined the others in the drawing-room, and I softly whispered to her, "Nelly—one word—just one. Tell me, was Percy Lascelles the stranger who rendered you that service in the German inn? Yes, or no?"

"Yes;" so gently uttered that I could only just hear it.

"All right," I replied; "I thought so."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CHEVALIER BAYARD.

It was all explained to me afterwards. Percy Lascelles had been summoned abroad on some business of importance—of this fact I was aware at the time; but knowing that he went for duty, not for pleasure, and also knowing that his visit was a very short one, it had never entered my head that he could by any chance have encountered Nelly O'Brien; nor had he for an instant imagined that the lovely girl to whom he had on two separate occasions been of such signal service, was the fair Irish governess, of whom he had so frequently heard.

All this being cleared up to my entire satisfaction, there was no longer the shadow of a misunderstanding between any of us. I laughed at Nelly's superstitious feeling in connexion with the dark, handsome stranger; and said all her odd emotions on first beholding him were sufficiently accounted for by the fact of his being my particular friend, with whom she would necessarily be much brought into contact, but whose influence over her we might be sure would never be exerted for anything but her good and happiness. And so we were all very happy at the

cottage; and this little cloud passed entirely away, leaving not a trace behind to mark that it had ever been there.

Percy frequently accompanied me on my visits, and he became a very great favourite with both ladies, and ever met with the warmest of welcomes. He was always in the way when wanted; and never by any chance an intruder on occasions when, perhaps, I did not much mind seeing the light of his cigar glimmering at the far end of the garden walk; for there are times and seasons when the best and dearest of friends may be *de trop;* and of this fact Percy seemed to be as well aware as myself.

Lady Dun den frequently regretted that she was not musical, for she knew that I liked music and that Percy was devoted to it; but instead of this, we chatted, had long and interesting discussions on all manner of subjects, and very often we had a rubber of whist, an amusement to which Miss Carew was remarkably partial, and at which she was quite a proficient. Percy, also, played admirably, but I fear they found but poor coadjutors in Nelly and myself; for we knew very little of the game, and I regret to say, did not bestow a sufficient portion of attention on it to lead to the supposition that some day we should do great things in that line.

Miss Carew made comical grimaces when I trumped a trick that was already hers; and Percy smiled and shook his head despairingly when Lady Duneden palpably revoked, and appeared unconscious of having done anything rather out of the permitted order of things. Then we took delicious strolls by the broad light of the full summer moon; Miss Carew and Percy usually started with us, but the worthy

spinster had an antagonistic feeling towards rheumatism, and after divers muttered allusions to "heavy dew," and "night air," we discovered on rounding a corner that she had retreated to the cosy drawing-room; and that Percy, too, had deserted us, and was studying the stars from a little terrace in front of the windows, the point of his cigar looking like an earth-bound meteor of very erratic movements.

It was while returning to the barracks after one of those pleasant, social evenings, that Percy and I discussed my future prospects more freely than we had almost ever done.

"Well, Percy," I continued, in a gay tone, "I think I may flatter myself that your aversion to widows is a thing of the past. Nelly has worked quite a revolution in your ideas on that subject."

"She has worked a revolution in many of my ideas, Charley," he replied, warmly. "She is a good, true-hearted woman, whom any man might be proud to call his wife; but you are not undeserving of her, my boy; I will say that for you;" and he gave my hand an affectionate grasp.

"She is too good for me, Percy; I feel that."

"No, my boy," he said, kindly, "she is not one of your overwrought monsters of perfection, too ethereal and highly strung for any use or good in this world; I should not like her nearly so well if she were; there is no feeling sympathy with angels of this description. She is a warm-hearted, loving woman, and has doubtless her own faults and failings, though I must say I cannot name them. I fancy, Charley, that she may be impulsive and perhaps apt to be swayed by the feeling of the moment; but, God knows, on this head I have no right to offer an opinion, it is only too

much my own nature. I think that her Irish disposition may incline her to speak and act hastily where her pride or her affection were wounded by one for whom she felt regard; but this is the fault of a noble nature, and all with her is open and transparent as the day; you will never meet with deception or duplicity from her, if she is the woman I take her to be. Prize her, Charley, for you have indeed found a pearl of the purest water; prize her well, and do all in your power to secure her happiness."

"I will, indeed I will;" I replied, warmly. "You may trust me for that; I will do my very best to make Nelly happy."

If the lady of my love were thus fortunate in the possession of Percy's good opinion, he occupied a no less honourable position in her regard and esteem; indeed, I sometimes laughingly declared that I was jealous of the way in which she and Miss Carew re-echoed his praises.

The two ladies and myself were sitting in the garden one evening, and I had just been apologizing for Percy's unavoidable absence, he having been detained in barracks by some business of consequence.

"Charley," said Nelly, suddenly, "how is it that your friend Captain Lascelles has never married?"

"Never married!" I replied; "you say that as if he were sixty, at the very least; instead of a handsome man in the very prime of life, with time enough before him to marry a dozen wives, if he pleases."

"Of course I don't mean that he is old, for he is quite young; but he is so nice, that I wonder he has not been picked up long ago. He has such domestic tastes, too; hates balls and racket of all kinds, and he so thoroughly understands women and their ways.

Why, there is Miss Carew has quite lost her heart to him, and she has the worst possible opinion of young men now-a-days. Haven't you, dear?"

"Oh, no, Lady Duneden, I am not quite so bad as that; people would be apt to say the grapes were sour if I affected to look down on mankind generally. Besides, my dear, I really do nothing of the kind."

"Oh, you traitress!" said Nelly, laughing, and shaking her fore-finger reproachfully at the worthy old lady; "how can you tell such very shocking fibs? Did not you and I return home only last night, and sit in judgment on all the fine gentlemen at Lady Mary's party; and didn't we abuse above all those loungers at the doorway who stood there the whole time, stroking their great, ugly moustaches, and staring so ferociously about them, just as if they could have eaten up everybody that minute, and then looked about for more?"

"Yes, my dear, but——"

"And didn't you say that we wouldn't give the tip of our Charley's little finger for the whole lot of them? Don't blush, Charley; as I do not often flatter you, I shall just hint confidentially that Miss Carew considers you a model worthy of all imitation; and that you and Captain Lascelles are most honourable exceptions to her railings at the degenerate youth of the present day. Now, Miss Carew, is not this the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth?"

"Yes, my dear, that is all very true; but I don't exactly rail at the gentlemen of the present day; I only think many of them are sadly deficient in that respect and courtesy towards ladies which I have always been accustomed to consider as one of the chief marks of good breeding. I don't like the care-

less, brusque manner one so frequently sees now-a-days; were I a young lady, I should often feel myself insulted by the sort of free-and-easy indifference with which gentlemen so often treat them; it is not at all as it should be, and this is why I think so highly of Captain Lascelles and Mr. Nugent, who never forget themselves in this way, and are as polite and attentive to an old woman like myself as they could possibly be to a pretty young lady like some people who shall be nameless."

"There, Charley!" said Nelly, laughing, "you may stand some inches higher after that; but, indeed, it is quite my own opinion. And now this just brings us back to the point from which we started; how does it happen that Captain Lascelles has never married?"

"I don't think he ever will marry," I replied, with a little hesitation.

"Thereby hangs a tale, I see," said Nelly. "The course of true love has not run smooth in the case of the Chevalier Bayard." She often called Lascelles by this name in his absence. She said he was just her idea of the knight "*sans peur et sans reproche.*"

"Poor fellow!" said Miss Carew, in a pitying voice. "He looks unhappy at times."

"I wonder what went wrong," mused Nelly; "but it is no good asking Charley, he is as close as a mouse when he has a secret in hand, and so he ought to be. I am sure it was not his fault," she continued, energetically. "He would do nothing that was wrong or unworthy. They must have been too poor to marry; and yet a woman might have made some sacrifice for such love as his must have been—she would have been well repaid."

"Do you know, my dear," said Miss Carew, quietly,

"that, with all my esteem for Captain Lascelles, I am not quite sure whether his wife might not have found a good many thorns among her roses."

"Do you think so?" replied Nelly, wonderingly. "What can have put such an idea into your head? To me he seems so good, so gentle; I should fancy him so tenderly careful of any woman he loved, striving to shield her from every care and sorrow; unmindful of vexations to himself, so that she were preserved from but the shadow of evil."

Why did that cold, uncomfortable weight press upon my heart? Why did that undefinable and most wretched feeling steal over me? Was I envious of the praises bestowed on Percy Lascelles? Was I jealous, because others as well as myself could appreciate the excellences of this best of friends? I hated myself for the unworthy thought; and hastened to add my tribute to the character of one who had so often proved his tenderness of heart and watchful care towards me.

"You are right, Nelly," I said, eagerly. "He is, indeed, all you imagine him; even better and kinder than you believe him to be."

"I like to hear you say this, Mr. Nugent," remarked Miss Carew, gently; "it is pleasant to witness the friendship that exists between you and Captain Lascelles; long may it continue; for I am sure he is a sincere friend, and I know from himself how deep is the interest he takes in you."

"Dear Percy!" I inwardly exclaimed; "what a wretch I was to be jealous of you, even for a moment!"

"But, in spite of all that," continued Miss Carew, "I must still hold to my former assertion, that the woman whom Captain Lascelles loved would have

many and great trials. Many clouds would darken the horizon; and great prudence, great forbearance would be necessary to prevent those clouds from bursting into a storm. He is a peculiar man, and there are depths in his nature it would be as well to leave unexplored. He sometimes reminds me of a volcano, apparently hushed in profound repose, not a sign or a symptom of the fires that are raging within; but they are there, and who can tell the moment that may call them into life?"

"There is much truth in what you say, Miss Carew," I remarked; "I think Percy is naturally hot-tempered, but at the same time he has great control over himself."

"I believe that," she replied; "and it would be no light matter that would cause him to lose that self-command. His is a very fine nature, and he has a kind, generous heart; I would fain hope that there is yet much happiness in store for him."

On thinking over this conversation as I walked home to the barracks that night, I did not much wonder at the interest which Percy Lascelles inspired in all who were brought into familiar contact with him.

His manner, to women especially—that is, when he respected and liked them—had a winning gentleness and manly consideration, that could not fail to obtain for him a high place in their good graces. His style of conversation was so gentlemanly, so far removed from either flippant familiarity or careless indifference; and never could word or look of his bring the faintest blush to an innocent cheek, or cause even a moment's discomfort to the most fastidious.

A true gentleman in word, act, and *thought* was

Percy Lascelles. Nelly had indeed rightly named him the "Chevalier Bayard;" and yet the unwelcome thought would now and then intrude itself that I did not quite like the very high encomiums she so frequently bestowed on him. From Miss Carew I did not mind them in the least; nay, I was pleased that she should so highly estimate Percy's character; but somehow or other they rather grated on my ears when pronounced by the bright lips of Lady Duneden; and do all that I would, I could not rid myself of this uncomfortable feeling.

I reached the barracks, and on seeking Percy in his room, I found him writing busily; so, telling him that I would not interrupt him, I was turning away, when he raised his head from the paper, and asked, "All well at the cottage, Charley?"

"Very well," I replied. "I made your excuses as well as I could, but they were very sorry you could not accompany me."

"Not more sorry than I was myself, I assure you," he observed; "but business must supersede pleasure sometimes."

It was early yet, too early to think of turning in—at least, I did not feel particularly inclined for it just then; and somehow or other, neither did I feel inclined for a cigar, with only my own reflections to keep me company. So I tapped at Barry's door, and found that jovial son of Erin snugly ensconced in a huge arm-chair, his feet comfortably reposing on the table, on which stood a well-filled case-bottle of brandy, a carafe of water, and a tumbler containing a judiciously modified mixture of the aforesaid beverages; this agreeable "interior" being faintly veiled by rather a dense atmosphere of tobacco-smoke, for Barry was just then

indulging in his evening weed, a custom he would not have omitted on any account whatever.

"Is it you, Charley? Be the powers, but you are welcome. 'A sight of you is good for sair een,' as they used to say in our old quarters in bonny Scotland."

I advanced to the table, and took possession of a vacant chair.

"Open that door behind you, and you'll find a tumbler; that stuff in the bottle is just about right, and no mistake," continued Barry, cheerily; "and try one of those cigars, they're a prime lot, though I say it that should not."

"Where did you get them?" I inquired, more for the sake of saying something than because I was particularly interested in the whereabouts of the tobacco; which, however, was uncommonly good.

"From that precious old scoundrel, Aaron Levy. The old sinner discounted some paper for me the other day; and faith it's no less than a good half I had to take out in beastly port and paving-stones, let alone a dozen or two boxes of cigars, by no means the worst part of the transaction. It's my opinion he didn't know how good they were; but so much the better for me. The port is not fit for pigs, and the paving-stones I have never even inquired about. Sure, what infernal scamps these Jews are, and yet what the devil can a fellow do? He must go to them when he is hard up. The comfort is, it will be all the same a hundred years hence; so I just say 'All serene,' and take another weed upon it; it's far the best way, Charley, my boy."

"I believe it is, Barry," I replied, rather absently.

"Oh! by-the-bye, before I forget, I had a letter

from Splash to-day; and Splash is altogether in the seventh heaven. He is the proud papa of a real, live son and heir; and they are going to call him after that fellow who died off in the nick of time, Mrs. Splashton's first love, you know."

"He was not her first love," I replied; "she never cared for him at all."

"Well, she was to have married him anyway, sure it's all one. But as the poor devil took himself out of the way just when they wanted, I suppose they mean to show their gratitude for his conduct by calling the young one after him."

"Fred Splashton was a very good fellow," I observed. "I am glad it is a boy, for I know they wished an heir to Dyne Court."

"His letter should be somewhere," said Barry, plunging his hand vigorously into the recesses of various pockets. "I meant to show it to you, but the devil a bit of it can I find. He said he showed the baby to that big black dog of his wife's, who looked at it as if he would like to make one mouthful of it; and Splash laughed, and said, 'Ah! Nip, my fine fellow, you'll have your nose put out of joint now!' on which Nip gave a growl, and Mrs. Splashton called out from the bed, 'Don't believe him, Nip; nothing of the kind shall happen to you, my good old dog. Does he think I shall like a nasty, little, squalling baby better than you, my fine fellow?' Upon which Nip looked quite contemptuously at the baby, and marched off in silent indignation; and he has been quite sulky with Splash ever since."

"Poor old Nip," I soliloquized.

"I say, Charley, what's the matter with you?" said

Barry, inquiringly. "You're a peg and a-half too low to-night. What is wrong, my dear boy?"

"Nothing," I replied, shortly.

"Well, that's not much, certainly; but nothing doesn't give you that hang-dog look, and nothing doesn't make you sigh forty-engine power, as you have been doing for the last half-hour. What's wrong, Charley? Out with it, make a clean breast of it; I'll help you if I can."

I still remained silent, puffing away at my cigar.

"Sure, Charley, that's not kind of you," said Barry, in a reproachful tone; "I'd tell you if I had anything on my mind. Two heads are often better than one. You haven't been quarrelling with Percy Lascelles? A split in the cabinet, eh?"

"Oh, no, Barry; nothing of the kind."

"Nothing wrong at the cottage, I hope? I know you were there to-night. Has the pretty widow been treating you to a few frowns instead of those bewitching smiles of hers, with which she is turning all the susceptible heads in Dublin? I say, Charley, when are we to congratulate you? Which is it to be, you or Lascelles?"

"I don't understand you, Barry. What—what do you mean?"

"Sure my meaning is plain enough; but maybe I am speaking too soon. It's clear enough to me that that lovely creature is to become the prize of one of you, and as far as I can judge you are the lucky winner; indeed, that is all as it should be."

"What makes you think so, Barry?" I inquired.

"Two and two make four, my dear fellow; and I

have eyes, although you, maybe, do not think it; and ears, too, for that matter."

"Well, Barry?"

"Oh! I must explain myself, must I? Well, then, I'll do it. Two good-looking young fellows like Lascelles and you, don't go dangling for ever after a pretty woman like Lady Duneden for nothing; nor do I think her the woman to allow such remarkable intimacy without she intended to marry one of you in the end. She can't have you both, you know, bigamy being contrary to the laws of the land; and I only hope it is all cut and dried long before this. You have the best right to her, seeing that you are an old friend, and were kind to her at a time when she much needed it. Maybe I am saying more than I have any right to do; but I see there is something on your mind, my boy, though I may be wrong in my conjectures as to what it is. She is a right pretty woman, Charley, and no one could blame either of you for falling in love with her; but I would be sorry to see any misunderstanding between Percy Lascelles and you. He has been your friend, Charley; a very good friend he has been, and will be. Let all be open between you—no reserve or concealment. Sure it is by far the best way, and you will find that in the long run. If you think she likes you, and you feel that you cannot give her up, go to Lascelles and tell him so; and if I know anything of Percy Lascelles, he is not the man to stand in your way, even at the cost of a few twinges to himself. Some people call Percy cold and proud; I can only say that I know no man who would more readily do another a good turn if he could; and if I were in any scrape or trouble, I know nobody to whom I would sooner apply for advice or assistance than Percy Las-

celles; ay, and with the certainty of getting it too. He may have his faults—we are none of us perfect, sure it's myself that is a far remove from that same; but take my word for it, Charley, we haven't got a better fellow in the regiment than Lascelles; and the 144th are not such a bad lot either. Then, on the other hand, if you think Percy is deeply in for it, and giving her up will be a very serious matter to him, put a bold face on it and give her up yourself: that is, of course, if you think she has a liking for him. Better now than when you have both gone too far to retract. You will thank me for my advice some day, Charley, though you may not quite like it now. Lookers-on see more of the game than the players; and I have had my misgivings about you lately, my dear boy. Don't mind my plain speaking—sure I mean it all kindly—you've a fast friend in Ned Barry, if you'll only believe it. Take another weed, and don't speak unless you like it; only just say it's all right, that you're not offended at my long sermon."

"My dear Barry, I am infinitely obliged to you," I replied, with energy; "offended, indeed! pray don't suppose me such a brute."

"Well, advice is not always taken in good part," said Barry, musingly; "sure I don't know that my own taste runs very much in favour of it. People always have an idea that they are best able to judge of their own concerns; and the supposition seems rather a natural one. And what's the odds, Charley, my boy, so long as we're happy?"

"Very true," I replied.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

PERHAPS the reader can understand that I did not have a very sound night's rest after the conversation detailed in the last chapter; it set me thinking—thinking very seriously.

I did not doubt Nelly for an instant, nor Lascelles; I knew the latter would never willingly supersede me in the affections of one whom I could scarcely avoid considering as my betrothed wife; nor had I any reason to imagine that he regarded her in any other light than as a beautiful and agreeable woman—the future bride of his greatest friend.

Nelly liked Lascelles very much—I knew that; but as to loving him, that was quite another matter. Even when I had felt uncomfortable at her high praises of him, I had never seriously contemplated the possibility of there being good grounds for this idea on my part; never had I seen the slightest symptom of anything that could lead me to suppose there was more than common friendship between them.

But now, Barry had planted fresh thorns in my heart; I did not believe I had any serious cause for

uneasiness, but I did not like to hear Lady Duneden's name coupled with Percy's; I had never dreamt of his friendly intercourse with the cottage being misconstrued in this way; and yet there was nothing the least unnatural in it. Percy was a young, handsome, unmarried man; there was no apparent reason why such a conclusion should be regarded as improbable; none but ourselves knew the facts of the case, and how unlikely it was that he should ever form another attachment. And then the ghosts of my former dim forebodings rose up against me; and in the silent watches of that long, wretched night many a sad reflection came over me, till my bed became a place of torture, and my pillow no longer the friendly haven it had ever been.

I rose weary and unrefreshed. All through that day I wandered about almost as if I were in a dream; I was unsettled, doubtful, wretched.

The evening came.

A musical party of some note was to come off somewhere; Lady Duneden was invited, and several of the 144th were also among the guests. I was going of course; and Nelly, Mrs. Grant, and I had badgered Percy into agreeing that he also would bear us company.

I watched them closely, but could detect nothing to give me the slightest uneasiness; their greeting was calm and friendly, and as Lady Duneden was forthwith carried off into a most unassailable corner, especially sacred to the grandees of the party, Percy and I had to retire to the locality usually allotted to the male species on the occasion of similar entertainments, and for the present we were unavoidably separated. When the music was over and the supper-room open,

there was a general dispersion and amalgamation, and people walked about and talked to their acquaintances. Somehow or other I got wedged into a doorway—a portly dowager right in front of me; she was attacking an ice, and I patiently awaited the conclusion of her refreshment, judging she would then take herself off, and I should be released.

By this means I became an auditor of the following little colloquy; which certainly had not the effect of tranquillizing my already rather excited nervous system.

The speakers were two of the 21st Hussars, Travers and Wylde; they were employing their time in discussing the company generally, and I caught some very pungent remarks, a good deal more plain than pleasant, which would not have been particularly gratifying to the unhappy victims whose appearance or peculiarities had called them forth.

Presently Travers remarked—"Doosed well the pretty widow looks to-night; eh! Wylde?"

"She's a regular stunner," replied Mr. Wylde, shortly.

"I'd give a trifle to know which of these fellows will bring her down," remarked his friend; "the chances seem pretty even, but I think the young one has it."

"But isn't he her cousin, or something of that sort?"

"Not a bit of it. She was governess to his sisters, who treated her very badly; jealous, of course. Nugent interfered, and came out too strong in the civil line; so there was no end of a row, and the pretty governess had to change her quarters. He got her another situation, I believe, and then she married old

Lord Duneden. When she became a rich widow, she hunted up Nugent, and means to marry him out of gratitude; that is, if Captain Lascelles doesn't cut him out."

"So that's her history! I always knew there was a something, but I've heard a dozen different stories."

"This is the true one, I know for a fact; so Nugent is clearly the man if she don't change her mind. Lascelles and he are sworn allies, so I suppose they understand each other."

"The deuce they do! Well, all I know is, I would see myself far enough before I threw such a good-looking fellow as Lascelles in the way of any woman I wanted to marry. All my particular friends for the time should have red hair, or a squint."

Travers laughed. "Come, Nugent is not bad looking himself; and the widow may prefer fair men."

"He's a very gentleman-like young fellow, I grant you; but by Jove! no more to be compared to Lascelles than I to Hercules. Why, you don't often see a handsomer man than Captain Lascelles; those eyes of his ought to walk into a woman in no time at all. You just catch me letting him wander about like a tame cat in any house where I wanted to be number one with the womankind."

"Well, it might be dangerous, there's no saying. But I like Lascelles; he's done me two or three good turns lately, and I think he's the right stuff. He's a queer fellow, and I have heard no end of things about him. He'd lots of tin at one time, and another heir turned up and ousted him out of it; and I believe that rather disgusted him with the world in general. But he's always doing people good turns if he can, and

makes no fuss about it. You remember Barker, of the 9th?"

"Perfectly. The seedy little fellow who never drank any wine, and couldn't purchase."

"Exactly. The poor devil hadn't a farthing but his pay, and there he stuck as a lieutenant for ever so long; saw the young ones go over his head, and had just to grin and bear it. Somehow or other, Lascelles and he were thrown a good deal together; and the long and the short of it was, that he insisted on lending Barker money enough to purchase his company, and wouldn't hear of a denial. Barker was staying in the same house with me last summer, and he told me the whole story. He was awfully grateful, as you may suppose."

"No wonder. By Jove! the fellow is a regular trump."

"Oh! and I'll tell you another thing he did, better still. Old General A—— had a fancy for him, and offered him a place on his staff; and Lascelles was just going to accept it, when my cousin, Tom Newman, came to him and said he would give anything for the situation. He had no idea that Lascelles was thinking of it, and he told him that the 10th was too expensive a regiment for him, he was getting into seas of debt, and wanted a decent excuse for cutting the whole concern. Tom was a friend of his, and a good fellow, and he knew Lascelles had some influence with the general; and the end of it was, that he got the post. Lascelles said nothing of his own wishes, but wrote and declined it, at the same time recommending Tom Newman. Now, I call that a fellow worth knowing."

"By Jove! I should say so," replied Wylde.

"After all this, he has my best wishes for his success with the widow; that is, if he has an inclination that way."

"There he is with her just now," said Travers. "'Pon my word I begin to have my doubts. Look at him bending over her; what a monstrous handsome couple they'd make. By Jove! I'd give something for a smile like that! how charmingly she looks up in his face."

"It'll be a neck and neck race, if the young one is not already distanced," replied Mr. Wylde. "Take my word for it, Travers, red hair and a squint are the best recommendations for a bosom friend. If he has had the small-pox, so much the better; it's a fault in the right direction."

This was a pleasant little conversation for me to overhear. I was not at all in a state of equanimity, but very much the reverse; and I was resolved if I died for it that I should have a view of Nelly and Lascelles, and judge for myself of their bearing towards each other. I managed this by dint of digging my elbows most unmercifully into the stout lady, and thereby compelling her to move a few inches in the direction I required; an atrocity which she furiously resented, and bestowed several most withering glances upon me. But I heeded them not; I had now obtained a position from which I could observe Lady Duneden and Captain Lascelles, and at first I really could not perceive that there was anything striking enough to draw forth the remarks to which I had just listened. He was bending over her certainly, for she sat on a low ottoman, while he was perched on a rather elevated piano stool; but he held a sheet of music in his hand, and was plainly discoursing in a

most elaborate manner on the excellences of something that had formed a part of the harmonious entertainment of the evening. But on looking more closely, I fancied I could detect a shade of embarrassment in Nelly's manner—a something that I had certainly never noticed when she was conversing with me. She did not look at Lascelles openly and easily; her eyes were often fixed on the ground, and raised in a hesitating way to his face, and her little hands played nervously with her fan and bouquet. I do not think all this would have struck me had not my attention been so pointedly attracted to it; but watching her narrowly as I did, I saw most distinctly what I have already described. Still, it might be nothing after all; the morbid fancies of my over-excited imagination, worked upon by what I had just heard, and by Barry's friendly warning. Then came the remembrance of his advice—"If you think he loves her, give her up yourself." I could not do this—I could not.

What right had Lascelles to come between me and one whom I had loved so long? What right had he to steal her affections from me, and appropriate them to himself? Was this friendly or honourable? Hard and bitter grew my heart as I meditated, and I almost felt that I hated Percy Lascelles. Then came the recollection of all he had been to me; and all his incessant kindness and and friendly solicitude for my welfare rose in judgment against my harsh condemnation of his conduct. Besides, was I sure that he had behaved as I imagined? Was Percy the man to act thus? I felt that he was not; and then I glanced at them again. He was telling her something that interested her, and her soft eyes were raised so shyly to his face, and a sweet pitiful expression was on

her lovely countenance. I felt sick at heart, a cold, wretched feeling took possession of me; tossed in a vortex of contending emotions, I knew not where to turn for comfort. Yes, I was thoroughly miserable. In my present frame of mind, society was a burden not to be endured; I contrived to slip unnoticed from the gay assemblage, and betaking myself silently to my own apartment, I threw myself on my pillow, in a vain hope that slumber would, for some hours at least, steep my senses in blessed forgetfulness. But sleep ever deserts those who woo her too eagerly, and so it proved with me. I remained restless and wakeful; and when Lascelles came to my door on his return, I answered his light tap with a fretful permission to enter.

"Why, Charley, what's the matter with you?" he inquired; "aren't you well?"

"I've got a headache," I replied, (which was true enough;) "and I'll go to no more of those cursed musical parties, they're enough to make one swear. I'm sick of them all." The reader will perceive that I am now thoroughly cross.

"Bless me!" said Lascelles, "why I thought to-night was not bad at all, in fact rather pleasant."

"I am sorry I can't agree with you," I replied, in a pettish tone; "but I am glad you enjoyed it." This last with a slightly sarcastic tone of voice.

"I really did," he said, with such honest sincerity that I felt ashamed of my petulance; "and I am sorry you did not, but if you had a headache that accounts for it. Lady Duneden was quite uneasy about you, and sent me to look for you, but I suppose you were gone by that time; we missed you just after supper."

I thought of their *tête-à-tête*, and how very much

they appeared to be missing me; and this recollection made me cross again.

"I daresay I ought to have let Nelly know," I replied; "but you were there to look after her, so I knew she was in very good hands."

I said this rather sneeringly, and almost felt as if I had gone too far; but one glance at Percy's open, unsuspicious countenance assured me. Nothing did he suspect.

"Oh! of course I did all she wanted, got up the carriage, and saw them safely off. They did not remain much longer; and I was to give you all sorts of messages, scolding and compassionate. They were afraid you were ill, and wished to have a bulletin early to-morrow; but I hope you will be all right then, and able to put in an appearance to satisfy their minds. A good sleep will set you up again. I shall not disturb you any longer now. Good night. I'll look in in the morning."

My headache was not better, but worse, in the morning. I did not have the good sleep that Percy wished me; I felt out of sorts, and out of temper; and I was not sorry when the regimental doctor, looking in, counselled me to keep quiet for a few hours and take a composing draught he should send me. A kind of low fever was rather prevalent, and it began something in this manner. Of course I did not enlighten the worthy Esculapius as to the cause of my indisposition, though I felt rather ashamed of deceiving him; I did not take the composing draught, but I remained in my own room, and I begged Lascelles to ride out to the cottage and explain the cause of my non-appearance.

He did so, and was, I thought, a very long time absent.

But he returned at last, the bearer of many kind messages; and there was a dear little note from Nelly, full of affection and regret for my illness; and then she mentioned that Miss Carew had also been knocked up by the party of the preceding evening, and was confined to her room.

And Nelly and Lascelles had passed this glowing summer's afternoon together! No third person to disturb their pleasant communion. They had gone into the garden, and had sauntered along its soft, grassy terraces, and rested on the rustic seat beneath that delicious lime-tree, where the murmur of the bees was heard in soothing cadence among the fragrant blossoms! How I seemed to see it all—that noble-looking man, that lovely woman—he bending looks of kindly regard on her—she raising her eyes to his as I had seen that evening—seen, and fled from the sight.

So intent was I on my own reflections, that I scarcely observed Lascelles was holding out a beautiful half-blown rose: "She sent you this, Charley, with her love," he said in rather a sad tone; "she said you knew what it meant," and a wistful look of by-gone years was in his half-averted eyes.

I guessed his thoughts, and stretched out my hand quickly for the flower. Alas! how it happened I know not, some roughness in my touch, perhaps—but the bud snapped from its stalk, and fell at the feet of Lascelles.

He quickly picked it up, so gently and tenderly, and gazed at it with a rueful expression, as though he had been to blame.

"Accidents will happen," I remarked carelessly; though in reality I was more vexed than I chose to allow. "Don't draw such a long face, Percy; it was

no fault of yours, and I have no faith in omens you know."

"It was such a pretty bud, and she chose it so carefully," he observed.

"Well, you must get me another to-morrow if I am prevented getting one for myself; there are plenty more just as pretty, and we'll take better care next time."

Look in this secret drawer!

Do you see this brown, withered thing like a chrysalis, and those few shrivelled leaves? Many a long year have they lain there, and there shall they remain while I have a heart to beat more quickly as I gaze on those relics of a time gone by. For these are the withered remains of that broken rosebud and its severed stem; and as I gaze, the whole scene is before me, vivid and distinct as though it had occurred only yesterday.

Our regiment had arranged to give a pic-nic to a well-known and very lovely spot in the vicinity of Dublin. I need not describe it, for all pic-nics are alike; that is, they consist only of two kinds, those that are pleasant, and those that are stupid. Ours was considered a very good one; we had a glorious day, agreeable people, no contretemps of the slightest importance, all went merrily as a marriage bell.

Lady Duneden went down in her own carriage, Miss Carew bearing her company; and Lascelles and I occupied the vacant seats.

Lunch over, we all strolled about in various directions; and it so happened that Nelly and I found ourselves wandering along the banks of a stream which was overhung by thick woods planted on a steep rising ground.

It was now some little time past the two years during which period Lady Duneden had promised her husband to remain unmarried and unengaged; she was now free to follow the dictates of her own heart, and I was at liberty to approach the subject that until now had been a forbidden one. But now I felt that I dreaded to do so. A kind of tacit understanding between us there doubtless was; Lady Duneden clearly felt this as well as myself; but of course we must soon arrive at some more definite arrangement than had hitherto existed, and somehow or other I had a strange repugnance to enter on the topic. Still it must be done. Once or twice I had thought of doing it, and then I had postponed it to a more favourable opportunity. Here was the very time, no better could ever be found. It had been agreed that we were to wander as chance or inclination led us, singly, in parties, anyway we chose; and at a given time all were again to meet preparatory to our homeward start.

More than two hours were before us; Nelly and I were quite separated from the rest of the party, no creature to disturb our *tête-à-tête*.

We wandered on, talking gaily and indifferently; discussing the pic-nic, the people, laughing as we recalled various absurdities among the proceedings of the day; and the more anxiously I wished to draw near the subject that engrossed all my thoughts, the more carefully did I select a topic of conversation far removed from and irrelevant to it. Just as I had summoned all my courage to my aid, and was on the very point of commencing, we turned a corner of the walk, and came upon Percy Lascelles stretched at full length on the turfy bank, calmly enjoying in

solitude the delicious sunshine and the pleasant murmur of the rippling brook.

Half annoyed, half relieved, I again abandoned my meditated design; and Nelly and I seated ourselves beside him, and began to banter him on his solitary tastes, declaring it was his bounden duty to have escorted some lady through the beauties of the glen, and expatiated largely on the various charms of the locality. He laughed at our imagining he was likely to act in this manner; and for some time we three sat chatting very pleasantly, and declaring that pic-nics were a very agreeable and rational mode of passing a summer's day, if people were not bored to do things for which they had no inclination, but were permitted to enjoy themselves according to their own peculiar fashion.

Vixen was one of the party, and I occasionally amused myself and him by throwing stones into the water for him to fetch out again. While so engaged I insensibly wandered a little way from my two companions; and chancing to see a tempting looking walk leading apparently to a fine view, I followed its windings for a short distance, and ended by completely losing my way back to the river; having entangled myself in a labyrinth of walks, each so exactly like the other, that I could by no possibility distinguish between them.

Following one to its end I arrived at our place of rendezvous; and as it was approaching towards the time when we were all to meet, I did not think of returning to the river side, but began to chat with some of the party who had already arrived.

Some time passed in this manner, group after group made their appearance, but still no Nelly and Lascelles.

Thinking they might possibly be waiting for me, I hastily sought the spot where I had quitted them; and as I did not encounter them in my search, it became pretty evident that they were still where I had left them. And there they indeed were, she sitting on a little mossy knoll, he stretched on the grass at her feet; the expression of both their countenances, (for I was sufficiently near to decipher it,) was that of total oblivion of the world and everything but their two selves; perfect, unmitigated, radiant happiness. How long they would have sat there I cannot tell; perhaps till the darkening shadows of night had crept around them, and the owls and the bats had come out to warn them of the lapse of time.

I gazed at them in a kind of stupefaction, and could not for my life have broken the spell that was over them and me; but fortunately I espied a party of late stragglers approaching, and as they would pass the spot where the oblivious couple were sitting, I knew they would warn them of our speedy departure, and I should escape the awkwardness of breaking in upon their long *tête-à-tête*. I therefore proceeded alone to join the rest of the party, and in a few minutes was followed by all the lingerers from the river side. Nelly, laughingly, scolded me for my shameful desertion; and declared it was all my fault they were so late, they had waited, expecting me to return every moment. I pretended to feel that I had been altogether to blame, and accepted my scolding with resignation; but ah! I thought; "How often did they remember me? How often?" The reply was not difficult.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AN ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

"CHARLEY! there is something the matter with you. Tell me what it is?"

Percy has lighted his pipe, and is slowly puffing forth volumes of the fragrant smoke: he looks at me with an air of friendly concern and pauses for my reply, but none is forthcoming. I, too, am smoking, but in a dreamy abstracted manner; this is a favourite time for pleasant converse with Percy and me, but to-night we have spoken but little, and that little has been of a very vague and disjointed nature.

"What is it, my boy? There is something on your mind, I have seen that for several days past. Come, tell me the cause."

"You cannot guess it, Percy? I should have thought you might."

He removed the pipe from between his lips, and looked at me with a surprised expression.

"I guess it!—indeed I do not. What is the matter, Charley?"

"Can you form no idea, Percy, that I have at present a reason—a cause—for feeling vexed and uncomfortable?"

"No, my dear boy, I had no idea of it; and I am very sorry to hear it. Why did you not speak sooner? I thought you had no secrets from me."

I looked at him almost doubtingly. Could he be sincere? or was this only a piece of refined acting? His brow was open and unclouded; his eyes met mine unshrinkingly—then they were lighted up with a glance of displeasure, and his forehead was contracted with a frown.

"Charley, you do not believe me! What have I said or done to merit this?"

"Oh, Percy, forgive me! I did not mean to offend you; but I am very unhappy, and—you are the cause."

"Good heavens, Charley! what do you mean? —what have I done?"

"Nothing, Percy—you have done nothing; I know you did not mean it; I know you would not willingly give me pain—but"—

"Well!"

"Oh, Percy!—can't you guess? It is not that I am jealous, only so unhappy about it. And, Percy, if you love her—just tell me, and—I will give her up; indeed I will, for you."

He had risen from his chair, and stood facing me, his hand resting heavily on the table, his eyes watching every syllable that fell from my lips.

There was a long silence. He stood as if spell-bound. I ventured on one stealthy glance, and in the expression of his darkening features I read, as in a glass, that no thought of this kind had, until this moment, crossed the imagination of Percy Lascelles. When he spoke it was in a strange, subdued voice.

"Charley, my dear boy, I never dreamt of this;

never, I pledge you my sacred word; but I shall never forgive myself the unintentional pain I have caused you. Thank God it is not yet too late!"

Those last words were murmured as if to himself. What did he mean by them? I wondered.

"Percy, I must tell you that this was first suggested to me by others. I mean, that you loved her. They did not know, and they said things that hurt me; and lately I could not help believing them."

"You should not have done so; believe me, you had no cause."

"Ah, Percy, I do not know—I cannot tell! I know that Nelly likes me, yes, I think she does that; but I am not a vain fool, I know how little I have to recommend me compared to you, and I have always felt that Nelly was far, far too good for me. You need not attempt to contradict me, Percy; for I am speaking the truth, and you know it. I loved her when she was poor and neglected, and wished to be her friend; and she is very grateful for the little I did, and I thought she loved me in return. But I may be mistaken—we may both have been mistaken; she may have mistaken gratitude for love, and now she may have discovered her error; or she may even yet be deceived, but it will not be for long. And you, Percy, are you sure it is only friendship you feel for her? May you not also be mistaken? I love her very dearly, Percy; so well, that for her happiness and yours I could even make this sacrifice. You have been much together lately; and, without knowing it, she may have crept into your heart, for she is very lovely and loveable; and oh! Percy, I feel that you are indeed worthy of her; I can pardon her for loving you; knowing you

so well as she does, it would be almost strange if she had not."

He paced the room for a few moments in silence, and when he did speak his voice was low and husky.

"Charley," he said, laying his hand gently on my shoulder, "my dear little Charley, there are not many hearts in this world like yours; and any woman, let her position be what it may, should be very proud of the possession of it."

"You think so, Percy, because you like me; and Nelly likes me too, but I doubt she likes you better." I gave a faint smile at this, but it was rather a dismal one. "Besides, you have not answered my question, Percy; tell me truly if you love her? I deserve to know this, for I have been candid with you."

A tinge of colour spread over his cheek and brow.

"You shall have candour in return, Charley. She is very beautiful, very charming, and I own that were I free to win her—I could love her. But until to-night I thought it was merely friendship I felt for her; and I solemnly swear that neither word nor look to the contrary has ever escaped me; of this I am certain. I am warned in time; you shall not again be uneasy from any act of mine; and now, Charley, let all this be forgotten by us both, and never again recurred to. You wound me by the bare supposition of such a thing as my permitting you to sacrifice your own feelings for mine. Tell me that you forgive me the pain I have caused you, and that we are fast friends as ever."

"Friends we are, Percy, and ever shall be; but this matter cannot rest here. You have owned that Nelly

is not indifferent to you, and I must be fully satisfied as to her inclinations before I can arrive at any decision. I will not be the means of making two people unhappy; if she loves you, I will resign her; if she prefers me, we shall still be friends, Percy; and in time you will also be the friend of my wife."

"Charley," he said, gravely, "I have committed a most unintentional error, the consequences of which might have been fatal, at least to our friendship; there is yet time to retrieve this error, and it shall be done. I have had experience to guide me, and I ought to have known better; I should have reflected that we might be misleading both ourselves and others, and the result proves that we have done so. But with respect to the affection of Lady Duneden, I do not think you have the slightest cause for uneasiness; I am convinced it is only as a friend that she regards me, as your friend, Charley. The fact of my being aware of the understanding that exists between you, and her knowing this, may probably have given a more confidential character to our intercourse; and this apparent intimacy has been misconstrued by those who are ignorant of the real circumstances; but this shall no longer be the case. I can easily make some pretext for obtaining leave of absence; this will excite not the slightest suspicion; I shall return when all is settled between Lady Duneden and yourself, and I can once more resume my position as the friend of both."

"No, Percy," I replied, "this plan of yours is very generous and self-denying, but I cannot agree to it. Nelly shall not become my wife except by her own free choice; and how can I judge of this if you are absent? I do not feel certain that she really prefers

you; I believe she is still ignorant that her feelings have undergone any change, and the strength of her gratitude may lead her to think she loves me. But there is no use in my blinding myself to the fact that her manner to you is very different from what it is to me; her look, her speech, the very tones of her voice are different; those are the signs that have guided me; I may be deceiving myself, but one way or other I must soon arrive at a decision, and then I shall know how to act. If I find she loves you, then my course is perfectly clear; at first it may be a struggle to resign her, I have only lately contemplated the possibility of doing so, but in such a case it shall be done; you and she shall be made happy, and in time I shall be so likewise."

"It cannot be," replied Lascelles, gravely. "Say no more on this subject, Charley; you pain me more than I can tell you. Good God! to think that I who once suffered in this very same manner, should be the one to cause similar distress to you! But I never dreamt of it—never."

"I know you did not, Percy; but these things cannot be helped. They are our fate."

"No, Charley," he replied. "Men often make their own fate; they are weak who are blindly guided by circumstances. It is given us to distinguish right from wrong; and if men will persist in wrong, when the right is before them, then be the consequences on their own head. I have wronged you, unwittingly, it is true, but still I have wronged you; I have remained in Lady Duneden's gentle and fascinating society, till I have unconsciously transgressed the bounds of friendship, with which alone I should have regarded her; and now I know that there is danger in again seeking her

presence. In such a case there is but one honourable course; to shun her society until I can once more meet her as a friend. Do not speak again of resigning her, my dear Charley; I could know no happiness at the cost of yours; nothing you can say will induce me to permit such a sacrifice."

"Percy, we will say no more just now. I shall be guided entirely by circumstances; but you must promise me that you will not leave Dublin at present. Promise me this."

Unwillingly he did so; and after a little more conversation, we parted for the night.

When I was again alone, I gave myself up to long and serious meditation. One comfort I still had, even through all the trial that might be in store for me; Percy had not willingly injured me; he was yet my friend, my best and kindest adviser. This remembrance cheered me through all—all that I feared and almost felt was coming. Something of a superstitious feeling stole over me as I reflected on all the strange circumstances that had attended the intercourse of Percy and Nelly O'Brien.

How ominously she had felt towards him from the first; how much that had flitted wildly through her mind, was now almost accounted for; how great an influence he might probably yet exercise over her future. In spite of all I could do to prevent it, I could not help vividly recalling the warnings of the old fortune-teller at Normans Court, and thinking how some of her wild predictions had not proved so irrational after all. It was nonsense to suppose that the old woman could possibly know anything of the mysterious and unrevealed future; but there had been, to say the least, a strange coincidence between her

wild ravings and events that were now taking place, or might probably take place.

Still it was a mere coincidence, though certainly a striking one. I wondered if Nelly would ever view it in the same light; and if so, would she remember yet more, and dwell sorrowfully and with dread on other dim and melancholy forebodings. No, she should be happy if I could make her so; and whether her gentle presence gladdened my home, or that of Percy Lascelles, she should yet recal with a smile those vain predictions that had threatened her bright young life with a sad conclusion; no trial or grief that human power could avert should cast its withering blight on the gentle spirit of Nelly O'Brien!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CRISIS.

A FEW weeks passed.

All went on apparently the same as before; to a casual observer there was very little difference; but a difference there was, and others saw it besides myself.

I went to the cottage as frequently as ever, there was no change in this; all was exactly as usual between Nelly and myself, only that I never directly or indirectly reverted to any understanding between us; our intercourse was more that of an affectionate brother and sister than as though any more tender tie united us; and above all things I sought to avoid any allusion to the fact of the stipulated two years having now much more than elapsed.

But, though I was as often as formerly at the cottage, not so frequently was Percy Lascelles my companion. He went sometimes, but never unless accompanied by me; and he studiously avoided being left alone with Lady Duneden, and skilfully disconcerted every plan I formed for throwing them together. Otherwise, his manner remained the same, kind and considerate; no one would have imagined from his behaviour that he was feigning an indifference which he was very far from feeling; only he did not linger

by her side as formerly, and more of his conversation was addressed to Miss Carew than had hitherto been the case; this was the only visible difference.

But Nelly felt that there was a change; it may be that she could not have analysed it, but she felt it, and I saw that she did.

Sometimes I observed her watching him stealthily for a moment or two; and then she would turn away dejectedly, and the dancing light was gone from her eye, and there was a tremulous motion in her full lip that told of mute sorrow and disappointment.

When I went alone, as was now often the case, I could see her glance furtively beyond me, as though expecting the entrance of another; and when the door closed behind me, and her faint hope proved a vain one, then could I see the soft colour fade away from her cheek, and her sweet voice would slightly tremble as she warmly bade me welcome.

This was all; but was it not enough? Had any doubt remained on my mind, the following incident would have dispelled it.

Percy had just purchased a very fine horse; Lady Duneden heard us discussing its merits one night when we were dining at Colonel Grant's, and she expressed a wish to see it, declaring that she considered herself rather a judge. Of course, Percy promised to comply with her request; and he and I arranged to ride out to the cottage a day or two afterwards, and exhibit his new acquisition. We accordingly did so; and Nelly and Miss Carew came out to the steps of the front door to examine and caress the beautiful grey, which pawed the gravel with its hoofs, and proudly arched its graceful neck, as though it were gratified by the notice bestowed on it.

We lunched at the cottage, and during that time the horses were put up by Lady Duneden's groom.

At last we rose to take our departure, and the servant came round with the grey and my bay mare; both ladies came out to see us mount, and again Lady Duneden stroked and patted the satin coat of Percy's new purchase. I was already mounted, and after bidding adieu to Nelly and Miss Carew, Percy prepared to follow my example; but his steed was restive, and would not allow him to mount easily.

Taking the reins in his hand he made a spring and vaulted lightly into the saddle; but hardly had he crossed its back when the animal began to kick and plunge in the most furious manner, and when it found that it could not thus dislodge its rider, it reared bolt upright, and for a moment it looked as though it must inevitably topple over and crush him as he fell beneath it.

But Percy sat like a centaur of old, calm and watchful, even when the horse was staggering on its hindlegs, and another instant might have seen him lifeless and bleeding beneath its ponderous weight.

Again and again this happened, the frantic plunging, the desperate rear; but now the grey is becoming exhausted with the fruitless struggle, its flanks are heaving violently, its smooth coat covered with sweat and foam; one last impotent effort of rage and the beaten animal will stand still and trembling, subdued by the indomitable will of him whom it must now own for its master.

But just at the critical moment when the grey had reared for the last time, and was on the point of descending with its victorious rider, at this very moment one of the saddle-girths suddenly yielded, and Las-

celles, taken by surprise, and unable to preserve his position, was thrown sharply and suddenly to the ground.

An iron garden-seat was close to the spot where he fell, and against this he was violently dashed; while the terrified horse, in its mad struggles to escape, struck its heels out in every direction, the senseless body of Percy lying among its very hoofs. In an instant I had flown to his assistance; the groom seized the rein of the plunging animal, while I gently lifted Percy's inanimate form, and laid him on the soft turf of the lawn. One glance I gave at his fixed, death-like countenance, and then I could look no more. It seemed to me that no life would ever revisit those ghastly features; that those closed eyelids were shut for evermore, so rigid, so motionless was his impassive form.

All that I have described had taken place in far less time than it has taken me to write it. One moment had seen Percy erect, in conscious pride of strength and skill, patiently and firmly conquering the unruly animal he bestrode; the next instant he lay stretched upon the ground, from which it might be that he would never rise again.

With compressed lips and terrified gaze, Lady Duneden had remained a spectator of all that had occurred; with her two trembling hands she clasped the arm of the no less alarmed Miss Carew, but neither of them spoke a word; they silently awaited the issue of the contest.

When it was apparent that Percy was victorious and all danger at an end, a bright smile illumined the fair face that had not yet recovered its delicate bloom; and Nelly was about to make some congratulatory re-

mark to Lascelles, when the accident I have already mentioned occurred.

Her scream! shall I ever forget it? Even now I hear it ringing through my brain; that wild, agonizing cry of a heart tortured beyond endurance—a heart that till now had suffered in silence, but which at that moment burst every bond, every fetter that restrained it.

Regardless of everything save that he whom she loved best on earth was lying apparently dead before her, she threw herself upon her knees beside him, she laid his head on her lap, and taking his cold hands in hers, she eagerly chafed them, while her eyes wandered distractedly over his pale features, vainly seeking for one faint sign of life.

"He is dead! he is dead!" she exclaimed, in accents of the wildest anguish. "Oh, Percy, speak to me! one word!—only one word! Percy! Percy!"

I was close beside her as she knelt; but she saw and heeded nothing, save the inanimate form she supported. She laid her hand on his heart, but felt no throbbing; she bent over him and put back the clustering hair from his pale forehead, and gazing fondly on his still features, she uttered again and again that wailing cry, "Oh! Percy, speak! Just one word! Oh! Percy, Percy!"

He heard her!

Had his spirit already winged its flight, it must have been recalled by that cry of anguish; and even in that deathly swoon those piercing accents reached his brain, and woke him for a moment into life.

As she fondly uttered his name, his eyes unclosed for one brief moment, and oh! the volumes of love and tenderness revealed in that glance. It told her all she longed to know; and though the next instant his eyes

were again veiled in unconsciousness, yet in that brief glance his carefully-guarded secret had escaped him, and Nelly felt that Percy loved her.

I saw it all—not one look—one tone escaped me; all along I had expected this—but yet, now that it had come, I felt that, even knowing what I did, I had still clung to hope, I had not certainly resigned myself to inevitable disappointment.

But now I could no longer attempt to deceive myself, my course was clear—Nelly O'Brien could never again be anything to me; from this moment I must steel myself to regard her as a friend—a sister.

"Nelly," I said, quietly, "he must be taken into the house, and a doctor sent for at once."

Torrents of crimson blood rushed over her face and neck, and pressing her hand over her eyes for a moment, she murmured in an abstracted manner,

"Oh! yes, I forgot—take him in—very gently. Charley—do you think he will recover? Oh! God, if he were to die;" and again she pressed her hands on her eyes, as though to shut out the mournful spectacle before her.

Miss Carew at this moment appeared, followed by several of the servants carrying a large mattress; and on this Percy was softly and carefully laid.

We bore him into the cottage and placed him on a bed just as he was; blood was streaming from a frightful gash in his head, one of his arms fell heavily by his side, and I knew that it was broken.

A neighbouring doctor was almost immediately on the spot; and I despatched a messenger for our regimental surgeon, with a few hurried lines to Colonel Grant, explaining the accident and begging permission to remain with Percy for the present.

Dr. Graham very soon arrived, and with him the desired permission. An examination took place, after which both doctors looked very grave, and shook their heads sorrowfully.

With the exception of that momentary return to consciousness, Percy had never shown the slightest sign of life; his eyes remained firmly closed, his cheeks and lips were perfectly bloodless, his pulse had entirely ceased, or was so feeble as not to be evident; there was nothing to show that the spirit had not taken its flight, and that what we gazed on was not a mass of lifeless clay.

But the doctors would not abandon all hope, and they patiently persevered in their endeavours to restore animation.

"With the injuries he has received, it will be a miracle if he lives," said Dr. Graham, gravely; "but if anything will save him, it is the enormous quantity of blood he has lost, which will help to remove the oppression from his brain. Had that cut extended but half-an-inch further this way, nothing could have saved him; he would not be living now."

"Then you think he still lives?" I inquired, looking sorrowfully at the placid features.

"I hope so. You were as bad as this when you met with that accident on the railway; and you came through in the end. Captain Lascelles has everything in his favour—youth, a splendid constitution, and he is moderation and sobriety itself. We must hope for the best."

The result proved the justice of his expectations, for Lascelles lived. Gradually his insensibility yielded to the restoratives employed; and though at first he was excessively weak, and the few words he spoke

were of a wandering kind, yet the one great fear was happily over; with care he was now likely to do well.

Soon I was enabled to communicate this pleasing intelligence to Lady Duneden and Miss Carew, who anxiously awaited the result of the surgical examination, and with eager looks questioned me on each successive return from the chamber of the wounded man. Besides the injuries to his head, one side had received a severe kick, causing him great pain when he breathed; and, as I thought from the first, his right arm was broken.

To remove him was of course out of the question; and the room he at present occupied was given up to him, his servant sent for, and a bedroom close by was also appropriated to me, as Nelly hoped I would remain and superintend all matters necessary for Percy's comfort.

Her manner was shy and nervous; she avoided being alone with me, and when she spoke to me, her eyes were always either averted or bent upon the ground. I longed to relieve her from this state of embarrassment; but had I done so, it would only have opened a fresh source of uncomfortable feelings; so for the present I refrained, and strove by my own apparent composure of manner to restore something like tranquillity to her trembling heart.

I partly succeeded; her timidity wore away by degrees, and before night things were established very much on their old footing; and in this state they remained for some little time, during the first period of Percy's convalescence.

For several days after his return to consciousness, there was a great risk of fever; and the slightest exertion, either of mind or body, was most strictly

forbidden; and I was only permitted to be with him on my faithful promise that I would not allow him to attempt conversation, nor indeed a remark, beyond the most trifling question.

To this I most resolutely adhered, in spite of many appealing glances and muttered inquiries from the invalid: and by degrees, as he recovered strength, the stringency of the rule was relaxed, and first Miss Carew, and then Lady Duneden, paid him short visits; those of the latter were very short, for the red spot on Percy's cheek, the increased light in his eye, and the trembling of the thin feeble hands too plainly proved that her presence was anything but a sedative, and that the excitement must not be too much prolonged. Still, if she did not go, he was anxious and restless; he glanced up at every opening of the door, listened if a voice, or merely a footstep sounded outside; and at each fresh disappointment he would throw himself wearily back on his pillow, and a contraction, as of pain, would cross his pale features.

Could I witness this, knowing so well the cause, and remain unmoved? No; I would gently leave the room and bring her back with me; and I had my reward in seeing the pale face flush into a momentary pleasure as he gazed on her who had unconsciously won his manly heart, and who was now dearer to him than either of them knew or guessed.

She never stayed more than a few minutes, and they were never alone; the time for that had not yet come. Indeed, I had at first much difficulty in persuading Nelly to pay these diurnal visits to her sick guest. At first she declared she would not go; and I had to convince her that it would look unkind were she alone to remain absent; and that Percy would feel his resi-

dence under her roof very awkward, if she did not occasionally assure him to the contrary.

The wish was strong in her heart to see him, too; it would have been a severe trial to her had she not seen him all those weary days of his recovery, and well did I know this. But the poor little thing dreaded and feared she scarcely knew what; and a feeling of duty and honour bade her avoid the presence of Percy Lascelles, though she could not but know that she loved him, and that he loved her.

Poor little Nelly! just at this time she was very unhappy; her loving little heart was in a strange chaos, and in the transparent countenance I could read the working of each opposing motive. She was so kind and gentle in her manner; it was quite touching to see how she studied me in every way, and strove to atone, by kind looks and words, for the grievous wound she had so unwittingly inflicted on me, and which she was yet doubtful whether I knew or not.

Once or twice I caught her mournfully looking at me, and as she glanced quickly away, her fair complexion was dyed with crimson blushes; and, in manifest terror and confusion, she made some abrupt remark, lest I might begin the explanation she so evidently feared.

Poor little thing! So often I longed to take her in my arms and bid her be happy, and know no more anxiety, for that with her all should be well.

At last there came a day when I could refrain no longer.

I entered the drawing-room one morning soon after breakfast, wishing to give a message to Lady Duneden. She was there, but as the door was open, I went in

without her being aware of it, and I stood and looked at her silently for a few minutes. She was playing with her little dog Carlo, one I had given her, and which she had sportively named after me; it was leaning against her as she sat, its paws in her lap, and she bent over the little creature, and patted its silky head, speaking to it softly all the time.

Very gently I advanced, till I was just behind her.

"Ah, Carlo!" she murmured, "you are a happy little dog; you have nothing to vex you. You are far happier than your mistress, Carlo!"

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Nelly," I remarked, seating myself beside her, and gently possessing myself of the hand next me; "I am very sorry to hear that you are not happy."

"I did not know any one was there," she replied, with a blush, "and I was talking nonsense to Carlo."

"No, my dear Nelly," I answered, in a grave tone, "you were not quite talking nonsense; you were telling the truth, I am afraid. I have seen for some time past that you are not happy; you have not deceived me, dearest, though you have tried to do so."

She was very pale now. She knew it had come at last—that dreaded explanation. I felt the little hand grow cold in mine—in mine that would have guarded it so faithfully! Had it come to this, that Nelly was afraid of me! But she never spoke.

"Nelly, darling," I said, with a faltering voice, "we will not play at this game any more, you and I. You have dreaded the time when all must be cleared up between us; and I, too, have felt unwilling to approach the subject, and have delayed doing so perhaps too long. But it was more on your account than on mine; I wished to save you all unnecessary

pain, and I will do so still, though a certain portion cannot be avoided."

Still she never spoke; only the little hand grew colder and colder, and trembled—oh! how it trembled!

"Dear Nelly," I said, soothingly, "you have no cause to fear me; I would sacrifice my life ere a hair of your head should be injured, and no wishes of mine shall ever stand in the way of your happiness. Do you remember once, long ago, telling me that you wished me to regard you as a sister—a dearly loved sister? I would not do it then, Nelly; I refused even to try; but now, Nelly, now you will find me more obedient; for I am going to be your brother Charley—nothing more, darling—never anything more. Now, dear one, you see you had no cause to dread what I had to say."

"Oh! Charley, Charley!"

She was sobbing now in a way it frightened me to hear; her slight frame shook with the violence of her sorrow.

I drew her unresistingly towards me; I clasped her to my heart, and she lay like a wearied child, her head resting on my shoulder. It was for the last time, the very last—my own little Nelly—ah! it had been better had she never left that loving resting-place; she might then have escaped many storms, for I loved her! Never till that moment had I fully realized all that was before me; and now I felt that the sacrifice was indeed a hard one. She was calmer now, and I spoke again.

"You know it is better so, my darling; and though I may find it a little hard just at first, I shall get over it by and by; and then, Nelly, we shall be all the better friends for what has been. We will never speak

of it after to-day; we shall forget it, or think of it only as a pleasant dream; there shall be no sorrow connected with it, Nelly; I must have this reward for all I shall lose. I do not blame you, darling, at all—it is no ault of yours; you have been very good and kind, Nelly; you could not help loving another better—it was fated that you should."

I felt her shudder at my last words, and was sorry I had used the expression, for I knew what was passing through her mind.

"I could not have resigned you to every one, Nelly; at least, it would have been a sore struggle; but he is so good—so noble—you could not help loving him; and I can give you up to him—for he will prize you as I should have done—beyond it, even he cannot go. And now look up, dearest, and tell me that you are happier now."

She raised herself from my fond hold; she lifted her tearful eyes to mine, and replied, with sorrowful earnestness, "Charley, I cannot say this, and speak the truth. There can be no happiness in giving up a heart like yours, a heart any woman might glory in possessing; even now, I am prouder of knowing that you have loved me than—than—oh! Charley!" she exclaimed passionately, "I wish I had never known him! I should not have caused you this sorrow—and we might have been so happy—"

"Stop, Nelly!" I said, hoarsely. "Do not torture me beyond what I can bear. I have lost you! Do not say what might have been; but which never can be."

She was terrified at my vehemence, and looked at me timidly.

"My dearest!" I said, more quietly, "I did not

mean to frighten you, but you distressed me more than you thought."

"Charley!" she replied, in a sad tone, "I shall never forgive myself all the pain I have caused you. God knows I have not meant it; but I have ill-repaid all the love and kindness I have met with from you. But I shall never forget it, Charley, never; till the last day of my life—while my heart beats—I shall remember your goodness. I shall never have so true a friend again."

"You will have many friends, dear Nelly; but I hope I shall always occupy the first place in your regard. No one must take that from me; I will guard that privilege jealously."

"I do not deserve it," she murmured.

"Yes, you do, dearest; and you will be my friend too, and so will—your husband."

She blushed very deeply at my remark; and then she said, with much confusion, "Charley—has he—have you—have you ever told him—what you have said to me?"

"Not exactly, Nelly. Once—before his accident, I spoke to him on the subject—for I had watched you both—but still I was not quite certain. When I found I had guessed rightly, I resolved that, if you loved him in return, I would resign every wish of my own, and I told him so. Now, dearest, it is for you and him to tell each other the rest; I have never alluded to it since, nor shall I do more than tell him that you are quite free."

"Not yet, Charley, not yet."

"It shall be all as you wish, Nelly darling; but believe me, it had better be soon; there is no advantage to be gained by delay. Percy will return to

barracks in a few days; let all be settled before then—for my sake, Nelly. I shall leave Dublin for a time; this I must do, dearest; I shall be better away—I could not remain here just at first. When I return, we shall begin a new life, the past all forgotten. Your engagement will be an old story then; and I shall escape all the first questionings and congratulations. It may be imagined that I was in the secret all along, and so we shall all avoid much that might be unpleasant."

"I shall leave everything to you, dear Charley; I shall do all that you wish."

"You may trust me, my darling; I shall do nothing of which you can disapprove. And now I must return to Percy; he must already be surprised at my long absence; but before I leave you, Nelly, promise me that you will never again let a cloud come between us, if you can possibly help it; and if, at any time, you wish for my advice or assistance, that you will come to me as readily as you would to your own brother were he now alive. Promise me this."

"I do, I do, Charley," she replied, in a faltering voice; "I do indeed. And you have forgiven me all that has seemed cold and unkind in my conduct—ah! Charley, you may—but I can never forgive myself."

"Nelly! do not grieve me by saying this."

I looked at her sadly, and met the wistful glance of her gentle eyes. I opened my arms—she threw herself into them and wept long and bitterly; one fond, lingering, last embrace—and my dream of love was over. Nelly O'Brien and I were now nothing to each other.

Friends! Yes we were friends—but friendship is a poor exchange for love. It is the shell without its kernel, the casket without its jewel; and to the young

heart, writhing under the first pressure of disappointment, it sounds very cold and empty.

The hardest part of my task was now over, there remained but little to do.

And yet Percy was harder to persuade than I had expected; it took me a long time and many words to convince him that my resolution was unalterable.

Only when I led in Nelly blushing and trembling—when I myself placed her hand in his, and bade them love each other well and truly—then could Percy Lascelles resist no longer.

I marked the glow in his cheek, the sparkle in his eye—I saw her timid and shrinking glance as she half averted her drooping head—and then—I looked no longer—I turned away quickly and left the room—I left them to their happiness and their love.

And now that it is all over, does the reader wish to know how I felt?

He or she knows me well enough by this time to be pretty sure that I will neither mope nor pine; I shall not lose my appetite nor grow thinner in consequence, neither shall I wander in a disconsolate state by dark winding streams, and murmur my pitiful tale to the willows on their banks and the rushes that fringe their rippling waters. No, I did none of these things.

I felt that a long-cherished hope was now for ever taken from me, a bright dream of happiness for ever dispelled; but I knew that I had acted honestly, unselfishly, and for the best; two people whom I loved very dearly were made happy chiefly through my instrumentality, and these reflections brought me much solid comfort; there is always a certain satisfaction in doing what is right, even when a good deal of pain may attend the performance of our duty.

I had loved Nelly O'Brien well and sincerely, and now that I felt I must no longer do so, there was a blank at my heart that would not very soon be filled; it seemed so strange to think that I had no longer any claim on her—that she was no longer mine!

Under every circumstance it was better that I should leave Dublin for a time; I was a restraint on Percy and Nelly, for as yet they had not recovered from feelings of self-reproach, though I did all in my power to remove this idea; I was not yet reconciled to the consideration that I must now be second where I had so long been first; slight twinges of pain would come over me when I heard her appeal to Percy in her soft, thrilling voice, and remembered how lately she would have turned to me for counsel or aid. They were ever kind and considerate; but little things would keep occurring that sometimes tried me sorely, and I saw that I must go—for a time at least.

It was very cowardly, no doubt—but I confess I also much dreaded the bantering remarks and all the "chaffing" I should have to undergo from the 144th and 21st. I was sure I should betray myself, lose my temper, or do something I should regret; and after a due consideration of what was best to be done, I came to the conclusion that discretion is the better part of valour, and I resolved to absent myself till the matter should be no longer a "new thing."

One curious change I felt had taken place in me. I seemed to be so much older during the last few weeks; the carelessness and light-heartedness of boyhood had for ever passed away; I now felt myself a man. There was a reality and soberness in life that had never before struck me; and I saw that I had crossed a gulf now for ever left behind me, the gulf that separates

thoughtless, aimless boyhood from the stern duties and grave realities of watchful manhood.

And yet I was not very old; but this feeling comes sooner to some than to others, and I had seen much to sober me.

But let no one imagine that I had become misanthropical, or was ever out of spirits; for I was nothing of the kind.

I joined a large and merry party that Sir Theodore and Lady Anson had assembled at Bromley Court; we were all there; my father and mother; Jack, the incorrigible Tom (a very good-looking boy now, and sedulously cultivating a pair of as yet very dim whiskers); the Nevilles, and a number of gay friends.

We attacked the partridges in the daytime, the claret at dinner, and wound up the evening with charades and deuxtemps; a succession of visitors came and departed, and many weeks passed before I again turned my face in the direction of Dublin and the old 144th.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FAIR INCOGNITA.

I HAD been paying a short visit to Dyne Court, and was returning to London.

Several very pleasant days I spent with Fred Splashton and his wife, who were indeed the happiest of the happy, rich in the enjoyment of every possible blessing.

Mrs. Splashton was greatly improved in every way, much of her former eccentricity had disappeared; she no longer affected the masculine either in dress or deportment, and what little singularity still remained was rather piquante and agreeable than in any degree objectionable. She quite worshipped Fred, who certainly made the kindest and best of husbands; he was a lazy fellow, who loved to take things easily, and hated trouble of all kinds; and the fair Milly had certainly a good deal of her own way. But she had plenty of good-sense to guide her, and there was no fault to be found with her management; and where any matter belonged more especially to Fred's department, she insisted on his undertaking its supervision himself; her last wish was to see him a cipher in his own house.

Nip was still in his glory, but the little son and heir

had no reason to complain of his position in his mamma's affection; no prettier sight could be witnessed than Milly bending over the huge dog with her baby in her arms, gently encouraging the infant to stroke the powerful head of her old pet, who sat gazing solemnly at the child, and quietly submitting to be clutched and pulled by the little fingers; while Milly smiled and patted the shining coat of her gigantic favourite, and addressed endearing epithets in turn to the dog and the baby. At last I left them *en route* to town, where I was going to visit my sister Annie.

We had to wait for ten minutes at one of the principal stations, and while the train was getting ready I walked up and down the platform. A very pretty little girl stood watching the motions of the engine; a fair child with beautiful long curls, and apparently about six or seven years of age. She was attended by a maidservant, but this woman was presently called away to look at some luggage, and the child remained alone for a few minutes. I observed that she approached very close to the edge of the platform, and had any train been near, I would have warned her; but the coast was at present quite clear.

However, at this very instant a goods train came up; it was going at great speed, and passed close to the place where the child stood. She did not hear or see it, her whole attention being fixed on the other train; and as she stood very close to the edge, the consequences might have been serious had it rushed past her without any warning.

Seeing her danger, I stepped quickly forward, and taking the little girl in my arms I lifted her back to a safe distance, and replaced her on the ground.

"Oh! thank you—I am so much obliged," said a

musical voice just behind me; and turning round I saw a very handsome woman, whom, judging from her fair hair and complexion, I supposed to be the mother of the little girl. She had approached just in time to see her child placed in safety, and she again gracefully expressed her gratitude for my prompt interposition. "My dear love, how could you be so foolish?" she said, addressing the child. "You should never stand so close to the edge of a station, you might have been knocked over and killed had not this gentleman taken you away. Oh! Barnes, why did you leave Edith alone? You must never quit her for a moment; she is too young to be left."

"I did just turn my back for an instant, ma'am," said the maid; "and there was no train in sight, ma'am. There was another box so like yours that Fenton was not sure which was the right one, and he asked me to look, ma'am."

"Well, never leave Edith again," said the lady decidedly. "My darling, you gave me such a terrible fright."

She turned to me with a charming smile. "She is my only child, and consequently very precious; I am most deeply indebted to you." Then with a low and graceful bend of her beautiful head she took the little girl's hand in hers and walked to the other end of the platform.

I glanced after her as she retired; she was very striking in appearance and style, and was undeniably a woman of the first fashion. Her dress was very simple, but also very recherché; she wore an ample dress of a greyish brown woollen material, with a closely fitting jacket of the same. It was what ladies call a "suit," and was tastefully trimmed with velvet

ribbon. Her bonnet was brown straw with a trimming of the same colour, and on one side a cluster of cornflowers and scarlet poppies. Spanish gauntlet gloves covered her tiny hands; and as she slightly raised her dress in walking, I could distinguish a perfect foot in a bronze morocco boot that fitted to admiration. All those details I took in at a glance, having always rather a sharp eye for such matters; and the attire of this lady met with my thorough and unqualified approbation. Presently it was time for us to resume our seats, and as the warning-bell rang I proceeded to take possession of any one that might be vacant; but I opened two or three doors in succession, and encountered carriages so very crowded already that I departed in search of one with rather fewer occupants.

I was fortunate. The very next I tried contained only the lady I have described, her child, and the maid; and observing me hesitate, for I half-fancied she might have secured the whole compartment to herself, she bent forward, and said cordially,

"You are looking for a seat—there is plenty of room here."

I jumped in instantly, the train started in a few moments, and I inwardly congratulated myself on having been rather late, thereby securing so very agreeable a position.

The lady was not at all one of those cold, unbending people, who freeze you with a monosyllable, and give you a languid glance from under their drooping eyelids as though they wondered at your assurance in daring to venture on the simplest remark in their hearing. On the contrary, she did not seem at all displeased at my arrival, and replied frankly and

smilingly to one or two trifling observations which I made; perhaps she thought the little assistance I had rendered to her daughter justified her in being less reserved than she would otherwise have been; but whatever might be her reason, I found her quite disposed for conversation, and for a considerable time we chatted easily and pleasantly on various subjects.

She was a very beautiful woman, fair, with a splendid complexion, and quantities of golden brown hair, which she wore in long luxuriant curls. Her smile was quite enchanting, displaying teeth, white and even as pearls; and her large sleepy blue eyes had a fascination in their azure depths not common in eyes of that colour; they were soft and brilliant by turns, and somehow or other the idea crossed my mind, that according to the will of this very lovely woman, they had been and could be a very subtle and dangerous weapon.

Her voice, too, was very low and silvery; there was pleasure in merely listening to its musical cadence, which lent a charm to her most trifling observation. I had no means of ascertaining who she might be; the maid never addressed her by name, and as far as I could see, there was no direction on any of the packages that lay about the carriage.

She was married, however, for the child called her "mamma;" and when she chanced to remove her glove, I saw the little golden circlet on her taper finger; but she never mentioned her husband, nor did the child in any way allude to her father, though she spoke frequently of "grandmamma," and I discovered that they were going to visit her in London.

Evening was approaching, and it became rather chilly.

I offered the lady my railway-rug, which was strapped up and lying under my seat; and in unfastening it my regimental plaid fell out, and attracted her attention.

I saw her glance at it with a peculiar expression, and then she remarked, with a smile—

"I see you patronize Scotch fashions. Surely you are not a Scotchman? At least, you have not the slightest accent."

"Oh, no!" I replied, laughing; "I am a Saxon, out-and-out—nothing of the Gael about me. But I belong to a Highland corps, and this is part of our paraphernalia. Perhaps you have never seen a Scotch regiment?"

"Yes I have," she replied, in a quiet voice. "Some years ago, one wearing this very tartan was quartered in the place where I then resided."

"Then it must have been ours," I said; "for no other regiment has the same. It is the 144th."

"Yes, that was the regiment," she replied. "It is now some years since I met them; and doubtless there have been many changes in that time."

"It cannot be very long," I remarked, bowing politely; "and some officers whom you knew may still be in it. Do you remember any of their names?"

"Most of them I knew very slightly," she replied, in a musing tone; "Major Clavering and Major Thompson I recollect.

"The former is dead," I replied. "The latter is still with us, and a very great favourite. I hope he is likely to be made a happy Benedick very soon."

"Oh, indeed! He was a very worthy man, I remember. I think the colonel's name was Grant—does he still command the regiment?"

"Oh, yes!" I replied; "and I hope he may long do so. He is an admirable commanding-officer."

I longed to ask the lady where she had known the 144th; but as she did not volunteer the information, I did not like to appear too curious.

She was silent for a few minutes, and seemed to be pondering something in her mind.

"You may remember some of the names of the officers, if I suggest them to you," I remarked. "Gordon—Trueman—Lacy—Etherege—Lascelles? Those men have all been some years in the regiment. Did you meet any of them?"

"Gordon—yes, I remember that name, and Etherege; but I knew them very slightly. Mr. Lascelles? yes, he was one of them. A fair man, I think—good-looking."

"Very handsome," I replied; "but a dark man—not fair in the least."

"Oh! dark, was he? It is so long ago, I scarcely recollect. Was he not a very lively person—extremely devoted to ladies—what people call a flirt?"

"Dear, no!" I exclaimed. "You must be thinking of some one else. Captain Lascelles is unusually quiet and reserved, and rather avoids female society—at least, until lately he has done so."

"Until lately," she replied, smiling, but at the same time with a penetrating glance; "thereby hangs a tale, I suppose. Some fair damsel has won him from his seclusion?"

"Well, it is no secret now," I replied; "Lascelles is engaged to a very beautiful young widow, and I hope the marriage will soon come off."

"A widow!" exclaimed the lady, in a tone of surprise; and a contraction, as of sudden pain, crossed

her beautiful features. "Is she rich as well as handsome? One generally imagines that to be one of the chief attractions in such a case."

"She has a large fortune," I replied, "and is the widow of an earl; but those advantages had no weight with Percy Lascelles—he is not a man of that kind. I know him well, for he is my greatest friend; and when I say that his bride-to-be is worthy even of him, I pay her the highest possible compliment."

"You are an enthusiastic friend," she observed, with a slight smile.

Her little girl at this moment called her to look at something which we were passing; and the lady turned to the window, and gazed from it silently.

"Isn't it pretty, mamma?" said little Edith, pointing with her finger. But she received no reply.

"Mamma, mamma! why don't you speak?" said the child, impatiently; and as she still remained unanswered, she looked up with surprise at her mother's face.

"Mamma, why don't you speak to me? Why are you so white?" she exclaimed, wonderingly.

The maid bent forward and looked at her mistress. I followed her example.

The beautiful face was indeed very white—it was rigid and stony.

The maid uttered a frightened ejaculation—

"Oh, ma'am! I'm afraid you feel ill—can I do anything for you? Better open the window, sir; the air will do her good."

"It is nothing," said the lady presently. "A momentary faintness, which I sometimes feel when travelling—the air has revived me already."

She turned her face to the sharp breeze, and let it

play on her pallid forehead and blow aside the long, rich curls. Soon a shade of colour returned to her lips and cheeks, and in a short time she expressed herself as feeling better, and that her faint attack merely arose from the carriage being rather close.

We were now approaching town. During the rest of the journey the lady remained nearly entirely silent. Before parting, she inquired where my regiment was now quartered, and when I told her in Dublin, she remarked—

"Then we may meet again before very long. I have friends in that town who have pressed me to visit them, and I have some thoughts of accepting their invitation. Should I do so, I hope I may see you."

Of course, I said everything that was polite and proper; and when we reached the station, the lady bade me farewell very cordially. I escorted her and little Edith to a very handsome carriage that was in waiting—prancing horses, servants in gorgeous liveries, all bespoke the possession of ample wealth; and with rather a feeling of curiosity, I returned to look after my own modest belongings, and to secure a cab to convey them and me to the Reverend Felix Neville's very comfortable establishment in Grosvenor Street.

## CHAPTER XII.

### OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.

THE following morning, as Annie and I were chatting by the drawing-room fire, a carriage rattled quickly up to the door, a thundering rat-tat-tat sounded all over the house, and in a few moments "Mrs. St. John" was announced.

She was looking so well. The old *insouciante* manner, the same perfect carelessness as to what people said or thought of her, but the same refreshing cordiality and genuineness.

And the same exquisite toilette—an olive silk dress, with a large scarf of the same material, the latter richly trimmed with black lace; and a little mite of a bonnet of quilted white silk, with one bright rose inside.

"How do you do, Mrs. Neville? How are you, Charley?—So glad to see you! Your sister told me you were coming, so I've reversed the usual order of things, and come to call on you instead of waiting till you left your pasteboard on me."

"But I should not have left my pasteboard," I replied, laughing; "I should have marched boldly in,

even had your Cerberus assured me that I was not on your visiting-list.

"Well, but my especial purpose in coming so early was to say that my opera-box is at your service this evening; it holds four comfortably. Granville is out of town for a couple of days, so we shall be four exactly."

"I am sure we shall be very happy," said Annie. "Come and dine here, and we'll all go together."

"That will do nicely; and if Charley picks up any very charming person, we *can* accommodate him at a pinch."

"I shall take that as a hint," I replied; "and as I am pretty sure Harry Leicester is in town, I shall look him up at the Rag."

"Well, ask him to dinner, too," said Annie; "I require a cavalier for myself. Of course, you and Felix will both devote yourselves to Mrs. St. John; so I shall get up a little private flirtation on my own account."

"I've no doubt Harry will be very happy to meet your wishes," I replied. "He has become a monstrously good-looking fellow, I can tell you. They call him 'sudden death' over in Dublin."

"Not to be too complimentary, Charley," said Lucile, coolly examining me with her glass, "you are vastly improved yourself. I always said I had hopes of you, if you recollect."

"I have not the slightest remembrance of your ever saying anything half so civil," I replied. "Your pretty speeches were few and far between."

"Oh! the base ingratitude one meets with in this world," said Mrs. St. John, shrugging her shoulders. "Here have I *bouleversé* my whole establishment, got

up in the middle of the night, rushed off without any breakfast, all to see this ungrateful creature, who maligns me to my very face!"

"Better than doing it behind your back," I replied. "If you heard what I say of you then, your vanity would be past all endurance."

"There now, we have talked enough rubbish for one time—very odd that you and I have such a remarkable aversion to common sense; and I have not asked one question yet, and I want to know such heaps of things."

"Better begin alphabetically," I suggested.

"Nonsense. Tell me how you like Dublin, and whether all the people there speak like Mr. Barry, and say 'ach!' and 'sure!'"

"A good many of them do, and I like Dublin very much."

"And the Grants, how are they?"

"Oh! very well. They've come out in the parental line since they left A——."

"So I heard. By the way, you have not congratulated me on being a '*mère de famille*.' Twin daughters, Charley, think of that! It nearly killed me when I heard it; I felt that in this world I should never know peace again; and actually Granville was rather pleased than otherwise, and called the little wretches Rose and Blanche, after those girls in the 'Wandering Jew.'"

"They are such dear little things, Charley," said Annie, enthusiastically; "you never saw more beautiful children; and it's quite impossible to distinguish them, they are so exactly like one another."

"Oh! he shall come and see them," said Mrs. St. John; "perhaps he'll feel for me then. Your sister

and I have arranged that when her little Arthur is old enough, he is to marry one of them, and that will lighten the burden considerably. I shall then have only one to dispose of. I think you had better wait for Blanche, Charley, and then they will both be off my hands. That would be delightful."

"Perhaps Miss Blanche might not think it so," I replied, laughing; "there would be a slight disparity of years."

"Only about twenty, that is nothing. I shall take it into serious consideration. I never could be a husband-hunting, manœuvring mother; if my daughters don't pick up husbands for themselves, they must just go without. It makes me quite sick to see all the horrid scheming that is constantly going on by mothers and daughters on the look-out for establishments; and to hear Granville and his friends on the subject absolutely infuriates me. If girls could only hear the way men speak of them, it might do them some good; I'll take care my daughters are never exposed to such remarks."

"So you mean to follow the French fashion, and betroth them from their infancy? Well, I shall keep my eye on Miss Blanche; I look on her as my property after this little arrangement."

"More improbable things have been. But, Charley, a little bird whispered to me that you have become a shocking flirt. Good gracious!" she continued, putting up her glass again, and peering at me wickedly, "I declare it's true, he's actually blushing! Oh, you base deceiver! what is to become of my poor little Blanche?"

"Mrs. St. John, how can you talk such nonsense?"

I exclaimed; "I a flirt! who could invent such a calumny?"

"Well, I'll tell you. A friend of mine, Lady Emmeline de Burgh, met you in some country house in Ireland; and she said you were the most atrocious little flirt she ever came across. There was some wild Irish girl you went scampering all over the country with, and then you went mooning about after a widow —actually a widow! and I have not the slightest doubt that you kept your hand in by giving Lady Emmeline a turn now and then—it wouldn't be her fault if you did not. Now, guilty, or not guilty?"

"Quite guilty of thinking all three ladies very agreeable, and probably of showing them all a certain amount of civility when they came in my way."

"What a Jesuit it has become!" said Mrs. St. John, with affected solemnity. "I don't think I should be justified in entrusting my daughter's happiness to his keeping. I rescind my proposal until I have an opportunity of judging in this important matter. I consider flirting the most intense depravity."

"Since when has this new light dawned upon you?" I inquired, laughing. "In the old days, you were esteemed rather an adept at this same depravity. I think the 144th would grant you a first-class certificate."

"I wonder who is dealing in calumny now! I never flirted with the 144th; or if I did, it was only with you, from the mere force of bad example. Mrs. Neville, you must be horrified at our remarks; but you perceive your brother is very incorrigible."

"I am afraid I must partly confirm your opinion of him," said Annie, smiling; "I have been listening to

a rapturous description of a lady with whom he travelled to town last night; her beauty seemed to be something wonderful, and she was also extremely fascinating."

"Oh, Charley! I give you up entirely; I'll have nothing more to say to you as a son-in-law. My fond dream is rudely dispelled."

"But he may be improved before little Blanche reaches years of discretion," suggested Annie.

"I doubt it very much," replied Lucile; "flirtation is one of those things in which '*l'appétit vient en mangeant,*' so I am afraid Charley will be something too atrocious by the time he is forty. And now we must postpone the remainder of our discussion until dinner-time; for I have an engagement at twelve, and it is now ten minutes past. Good bye, Mrs. Neville. Ta, ta, Charley. *Au révoir.*"

I went down to the club, and found Harry Leicester playing at pool. He made three cannons in succession, and pocketed two balls off the red; then, having carefully scored his points, he came across and shook hands with me.

"Dinner at seven. Very good, tell Annie I'll come."

Soon after seven we were all assembled; and Annie had invited Colonel Nugent to dinner, on the understanding that he was not to mind our leaving him, as nothing short of a miracle would have prevailed on the old gentleman to accompany us.

We were such a merry little party. Who that can appreciate the difference would ever compare the ease and unrestrained sociability of a pleasant meeting like this with those fearful affairs called dinner-parties, as they are usually conducted, or rather misconducted.

A neat little dinner, everything good and seasonable; no fuss, no ceremony, and an incessant flow of cheerful conversation. How different from those laboured entertainments in which the tables groan under a hecatomb of dishes, while the guests sit silent, or endeavour to force a little vapid small-talk; and everybody feels it a relief when their carriage is announced, and they can yawn and anathematize the infliction as they are rolled away from the scene of their late tortures. I don't say, to be sure, that in every party of six one always finds three such very amusing people as Mrs. St. John, Harry Leicester, and my worthy uncle; they certainly usurped the major part of the conversation, the Nevilles and myself contenting ourselves principally with enacting the part of audience. Lucile looked remarkably well in a white dress, with a crimson and gold net on her hair, which suited well with its dark masses, and gave a slightly foreign air to her appearance.

"It's such a comfort to have an evening to oneself," she exclaimed; "Granville has such an immense acquaintance that we are never left in peace; however, I declared against going anywhere while he was away, and absolutely last night I sat down and read a novel."

"Oh, Mrs. St. John! I looked for better things from you," said Colonel Nugent, shaking his head. "I did not expect you to confess to novel-reading."

"My dear sir! you amaze me. Don't you approve of novels? Then I must convert you."

"You won't do that in a hurry, ma'am. They are all trash—rank poison—to the mind."

"Now, Colonel Nugent, I had just arrived at the conclusion that you were a very sensible man; pray

don't force me to alter my opinion, which I shall certainly do if you abuse novels."

"Why, how can any sensible person do otherwise? I'd burn them all if I had my way, every one of them; the world would be well quit of them. Confounded trash!"

"Burn them! oh! you dreadful Goth. Burn all those dear novels of Walter Scott's?"

"Well—no—not exactly Walter Scott's; they're not so bad—I'd leave them—but no others."

"Oh! uncle!" said Annie, "you would not burn Dickens's surely! Who did I find the other day very nearly crying over that poor little Paul Dombey? and who almost forgot to come to Arthur's christening because he was so absorbed in the sad fate of little Nell? You would not burn Paul and Nelly, would you?"

"Well, I don't know. Serve them right for beguiling an old fool like me that ought to know better."

"You are restored to my good graces, Colonel Nugent," said Lucile. "Little Paul has made peace between us. Every now and then I try to read him up, but I can't do it; my eyes vanish, and I am not fit to be seen for a couple of days. In fact, Granville has hidden the volume now."

"We must have Lever too, colonel," said Harry Leicester. "Let me put in a good word for Charles O'Malley, oh! and Thackeray too; you wouldn't burn Thackeray?"

"Yes, I would," exclaimed Mrs. St. John, "in the hottest fire that could be made. I detest him! a wretch!"

"Bless me!" said the colonel, "what has poor

Thackeray done? 'Pon my word, I think some of his remarks are uncommonly sensible."

"I can't bear him. It's my duty to abuse him for the credit of my sex. Just look at his female characters! Every one of them is either a fool or a fiend; nothing between those two extremes. Nice opinion he must have of women. I wish I could see him, I'd give him a bit of my mind."

"Well, I don't know," said Leicester, "I'm uncommonly fond of Becky Sharp; I wish one could meet a few people like her. Don't you like Becky—Mrs. St. John?"

"A great deal better than Amelia," she replied; "but she is a most detestable creature; I don't believe there ever was such a wretch."

"By Jove! I'm not so sure," said Harry, laughing. "When women go to the bad, they certainly don't stick at trifles."

"Oh! she is so utterly heartless," said Annie, indignantly. "If he had only given her one little grain of feeling now and then. I am sure her husband is not made very interesting—a great, stupid dragoon that can't spell; and just because he shows a little natural feeling once or twice, one quite likes the honest, heavy creature. Oh! no Harry, Becky is really too bad."

"I won't give up Becky," replied Harry; "she is a prime favourite of mine."

"She's not worth fighting about," said Lucile. "I don't stand up for angelic heroines; they are all rubbish, as the colonel says; but the entire female population are not Beckys and Amelias, as Mr. Thackeray seems to think."

"Well," said Colonel Nugent. "I allow that there are a few unobjectionable novels, but very few; the

greater number that are written are vile, sentimental rubbish; and young women sit and read them when they had much better be making puddings or darning their brothers' stockings."

"Ah! colonel, girls never do such things now-a-days," said Harry, laughing; "you are thinking of the good old days; there are no useful women now."

"More shame for them," said the colonel, indignantly; "I never had any daughters, thank God! but if I had, they should have been trained according to my ideas of what a woman should be. They may be old-fashioned notions, but they are very correct for all that."

"I should like to hear your views on the subject, colonel," said Mrs. St. John, smiling; "I fear I am past improving myself now, but I have the awful prospect of bringing up two daughters; and as one of them is Charley's destined bride, you will be prepared to take a double portion of interest in her."

"Well, madam, in spite of what our friend Captain Leicester says as to there being no useful women now-a-days, I advise you to bring up your daughters exceptions to the general rule. From all I have seen of you, I take you to be quite the reverse of a fool."

"Excuse my interrupting you, uncle," said Annie; "but you must allow me to warn Mrs. St. John that such a statement from you is to be received as an immense compliment. I assure you, Lucile, you may be very proud of it."

"And so I am," replied Mrs. St. John, gaily; "and to prove my gratitude, I shall endeavour to follow his advice in the education of Rose and Blanche. Now, colonel, do enlighten my darkness."

"There now, you are all laughing at me for a prosy

old fool; I know the proverb about 'bachelors' wives and old maids' children.'"

"Now, really, colonel, you malign us most cruelly," said his fair tormentor, with a bewitching smile. "I have the greatest possible faith in you, but please don't say that my daughters must make puddings; consider the kitchen fire will utterly spoil their complexions, and I fear Charley won't thank you for a wife with a face the colour of his own shell-jacket."

"Believe me, my dear madam, late hours and hot ballrooms will spoil a girl's complexion far more than any kitchen fire that ever was lighted; and if they go there, as most of them do to pick up husbands, they'd stand a far better chance by remaining at home. Very few sensible men choose their wives from among the girls they see gallivanting about night after night, whirled out of the little sense they have by moustached dragoons and briefless barristers. They don't care if their wife is the finest dancer in town; if they did, their wisest plan would be to marry a ballet girl at once."

"Well, colonel, but don't you see, that according to your reasoning a man should decidedly propose to his cook."

"Not a bit of it, madam; not a bit of it; I don't say that a lady should live in the kitchen, but I can tell you that much domestic unhappiness arises from wives totally ignoring that portion of their establishment. It is not enough that a lady engages a cook, she should also see and know that the cook does her duty; neglect of this has driven many a husband to his club, and produced endless quarrels and disputings between married couples, who might have been very comfortable otherwise. Most girls know nothing at all of

housekeeping, and have it all to learn when they marry. Look at that poor little fool Dora that Dickens describes. Being a sensible man, he knew that even that amiable lad Copperfield would have got out of patience before very long; so he was obliged to kill the useless little creature for all, as pretty and harmless as she was."

"Ah! well, colonel, I see that Rose and Blanche must come out in the Cinderella line; and to prove my sincerity, I invite all the party here to dinner this day ten years, on which occasion I do promise and vow that at least two of the dishes shall be cooked by their fair hands."

"'Pon my word," said Harry Leicester, "I highly approve of the colonel's ideas. I think they are remarkably sensible. By Jove! what fun it would be to call on some fair charmer and help her to shell the peas for dinner and froth up the cream for syllabubs and that sort of thing—a deal nicer than looking at her cutting holes and sewing them up again, the only work I ever see women do."

"Of course, Harry, your wife must be a female Soyer," said Annie, laughing. "For cavalry men are all horribly particular, and expect everything as *recherché* as possible."

"I don't see that we are any worse than our neighbours," replied Leicester, in an injured tone. "But, of course, a wife like 'Dora' would be a shocking sell, unless one was rolling in money; for blue eyes and long ringlets are excellent things, no doubt; but they might become a weariness of the spirit, if accompanied by an unbroken course of hashed mutton and waxy potatoes!"

The entrance of coffee put an abrupt conclusion to our remarks; and the carriage being almost immedi-

ately announced, we presently betook ourselves to the scene of the evening's amusement.

Though far beyond the regular season, the advent of some continental star had occasioned a temporary course of performances, and the opera presented a very brilliant appearance.

The box we occupied was in one of the best positions in the house, and many lorgnettes were turned in its direction; where the stylish *tournure* and bearing of Mrs. St. John, and the delicate loveliness of my sister Annie might well excuse the searching examination they frequently encountered—to say nothing of the three good-looking specimens of the male sex by whom they were escorted—and I can swear to catching two or three very pretty girls gazing most earnestly at Harry Leicester's bronzed handsome countenance and dark silky moustaches!

The performance had been some time commenced, when the door of a box, nearly opposite ours was opened, and two ladies entered and took their places. One was elderly, the other young; and a second glance confirmed me in my instantaneous decision, that in the latter I beheld my late beautiful travelling companion. More beautiful than ever she looked in evening costume; her long fair curls falling on magnificently rounded white shoulders, her dress of pale green crape setting off the unrivalled brilliancy of a complexion that must have been deemed artificial, but that it was so undeniably natural; while a pure white cashmere opera-cloak fell gracefully round her stately figure, and lent a softening effect to her whole appearance.

As she took her seat in the front of the box, and carelessly arranged her fan and bouquet, all the lorgnettes

in the house veered round and assembled themselves upon her as on one common focus; but she either cared not for this marked scrutiny or was unconscious of it, for neither by look nor action had it any effect upon her.

I leant over from my position in the rear of our box, and gave my sister Annie, what is popularly denominated, a "nudge."

"Annie, do you see that lady opposite us in a green dress and white cloak?"

"Good gracious! what a poke you have given me —of course I do. Who is she? I am sure you have broken one of my ribs."

"That is the angel I travelled with; now did I overrate her?"

"Well—no—she is really very pretty—I wonder who she is. Lucile, there is Blanche's rival—that lady right opposite—in green. Do you know her at all?"

"Never saw her in my life before," said Mrs. St. John, coolly examining the lady with her glass; "very good style—very—looks as if she had a history—well, Charley, I shall forgive your inconstancy this time; and by the bye that reminds me that I meant privately to catechize you on the subject of this Irish widow, for you need not deny that you looked quite guilty when I mentioned her this morning. Where on earth did you pick her up?"

"Why, you told me yourself that Lady Emmeline gave you the whole history," I replied, trying to look deeply absorbed in a scene now being enacted on the stage, where the baritone was confiding his grief to the basso profundo, who every now-and-then gave token of his eager interest in the recital by a deep-toned vocal ejaculation.

"Why, Charley, you can't think what a row there was when her marriage to Lascelles came out," said Harry Leicester. "We had been taking odds on it for some time, but of course we all really believed you would walk over the course—never dreamt Lascelles would ever seriously enter."

"Oh! Harry, Harry," expostulated Annie, "how can you talk in such a very dreadful manner? What is the meaning of all that shocking slang?"

"It means that Harry fancied I was to be the happy Benedick instead of Percy Lascelles," said I with an attempt at gaiety which did not come very natural to me: "but unfortunately the lady entertained a different opinion, and therefore I am still in reserve for Miss Blanche if she will have me."

I rather imagine that Harry Leicester faintly divined the subject was a little repugnant to me. "Sewed up, by Jove!" was probably his inward commentary; and being a very good-hearted fellow, he set himself to work to relieve my embarrassment, and started another subject without loss of time.

"Charley, I shall soon be able to tell you who your fair travelling companion is and all about her; there is Tom Tracey just gone into her box, and he knows the birth, parentage, and education of everybody in the house."

Mr. Tracey was evidently on very good terms with my unknown friend; for she put out her tiny white-gloved hand and shook his very cordially, and for some time they chatted in an easy and intimate manner.

Several other gentlemen paid their respects to her in the course of the evening; and finally she quitted her box under the escort of Mr. Tracey, the elder lady

falling to the lot of a friend of her own standing. We encountered Mr. Tracey in the crushroom as we were taking our departure, and I overheard Harry Leicester question him respecting the fair object of our curiosity.

"Isn't she lovely?" said Mr. Tracey enthusiastically; "hardly such another woman in town."

"Well, but her name?" rejoined Harry. "Maid, wife, or widow?"

"She is a widow, and her name is Mrs. Vincent. Splendid jointure, and just one little girl, who will be nearly the richest heiress in England. I'd propose to-morrow, only I am afraid *la belle veuve* would snub my pretensions."

He turned away to address some one else, and Harry proceeded to communicate the result of his inquiries.

"You are in luck with widows, Charley," said Mrs. St. John, laughing. "Perhaps you may be more successful in this quarter, for you decidedly have a taste that way."

I hardly heard her, for like the dying gladiator, "my thoughts were far away."

Now I understood it all—the half-concealed interest at the sight of my regimental plaid—the feigned indifference of her inquiries respecting the 144th—her overpowering agitation when she learnt the approaching marriage of her early lover. I had met and spoken with Florence Templeton!

## CHAPTER XIII.

### COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

SOME little time I remained in London, and then I returned to Dublin.

I had corresponded frequently both with Percy Lascelles and Lady Duneden, and our mutual friendship was now established on the familiar footing I so anxiously wished; there was no trace of awkwardness in our cordial and affectionate greeting.

I thought it better to say nothing of my rencontre with the beautiful Florence, either to Percy or Nelly; indeed, the latter knew not of her very existence so far as I was aware; and I was certainly not the person to tell her history to Percy's affianced bride.

Perhaps it had been better that Lascelles had told something of his early history to one now so closely linked to him as his future wife; but he was not a communicative person, and, above all, he especially avoided recalling past scenes and recollections; such memories were to him anything but pleasurable, and he did not encourage them. His manner to Nelly was tenderly kind and considerate, but it was not so much that of a young and ardent lover as of a grave and watchful elder brother; whereas Nelly loved him with her whole

impetuous Irish nature; he was the light of her eye and the pulse of her warmly beating heart: how different was this passionate feeling from the calm, sisterly regard she had bestowed upon me. Now, indeed, I saw how Nelly O'Brien could love.

How she clung to Percy from her very inmost heart—how his approbation would make her eye glance brightly and bring the colour to her cheek, while an indifferent look or reply would turn it pale, and cast a shade or anxiety on her sweet features; now her every thought, word, and wish were for him, and for him alone!

Ah! Nelly, it is not wise to give such love as this to mortal man—not even to such as Percy Lascelles. Byron truly says,—

> "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
> 'Tis woman's whole existence."

Well and truly did Percy love this fair and gentle Irish girl; but such love as hers it was not in his power to yield again—one only time there is for such feelings in every heart; and with him that season and those feelings had passed away, and for ever.

But no such suspicion ever occurred to this innocent mind; she felt that he loved her; thought only of her, and she was content. It did strike me once or twice, however, that one of Percy's few faults was growing upon him rather more than I liked to see—a kind of apathetic indifference, that had the effect of obscuring many of his best and noblest qualities.

Curiously enough, this struck me more in reference to his behaviour to Lady Duneden than on any other occasion. It may be that I was jealous of anything that looked in the slightest degree like neglect or in-

difference to her; but I saw only too clearly that Percy was not the soul of devotion I should have been. But this may only have served to attract her still more strongly towards him: there are some women who do not care for too much affection, and prize most that love which looks as though it could easily escape their grasp if it so willed it; and thus it may have been with Nelly O'Brien.

Percy's old dislike to society had returned more strongly than ever; and though he would occasionally put a great constraint upon himself and accompany his fair *fiancée* to scenes of gay festivity, it was unwillingly done, and he was only too delighted when she would allow him to shirk the infliction, or accept me as her escort instead.

Perhaps she would pretend to pout, or be a little sulky, even after she had given the desired permission; but a few whispered words from Percy would dispel the light cloud and bring the sunshine of smiles once more on her half-averted face; and as he carefully handed her into her carriage, and arranged her shawl or cloak with a fond parting clasp of the soft little hand, the tender glance of adieu that beamed on Percy Lascelles used to give me a strange feeling at my heart-strings.

Nelly never said anything on those occasions; but once or twice I detected a longing, wishful expression in her dreamy eyes, and more than once I have heard a sigh, very faint and soft, but still a sigh.

Miss Carew was still her kind and watchful companion; and I could see that the good old lady was sometimes anxious for her young cousin, and regarded her seriously and compassionately. Once she uttered some of the thoughts that were passing in her mind;

and I found that on many points our views were the same.

We were sitting in the drawing-room one soft autumn afternoon. Lady Duneden and Percy were in the garden before us, leaning over a little tank that contained a quantity of gold and silver fish. They were great pets of Nelly's, and she had been feeding them with crumbs of bread.

Her occupation was finished; but still she lingered there with Percy, her soft eyes raised to his face with an expression of confiding love that told how utterly she was his in heart and soul.

He was talking to her in his calm, grave manner; very kind and protecting he looked in his stately height as he gazed down on the slight young figure beside him; but there was a difference between them that I could not exactly analyse—I could only see it, and feel it. Her love was greater than his; and woe betide the woman when it is so. Chancing to lift my eyes, I met those of Miss Carew fixed on me kindly and earnestly. Colouring slightly, she again glanced at the pair in the garden, and said gently and sadly, "Dear Nelly, she is very happy now; God grant it may always be so, poor little thing!"

"Why do you say 'poor thing,' Miss Carew?" I inquired. "Do you not think Nelly will always be happy?"

"I trust she may, most sincerely," said the old lady, kindly; "but she will not be as happy as she is now. I fear that many trials are in store for my darling."

"Do you recollect one day, long ago, Miss Carew," I said, musingly; "we were discussing Percy Lascelles, and you said you thought his wife would find a good

many thorns among her roses? Is this still your opinion?"

"Yes, Mr. Nugent, I think so still; I have seen no reason to alter my judgment on this point. I am convinced that Lady Duneden is not so dear to Captain Lascelles as another has been: he does love her truly and sincerely, but not as such a man can love, and has loved. I do not think Nelly has any idea of this, and I trust she may never discover it; it will be well for her peace that she does not, for I feel sure she would not calmly brook the knowledge that she was only second in his affection."

"But this she is not," I replied, hastily. "If Percy has ever experienced the feelings you imagine, they are long ago rooted out and forgotten. We all know that very few men ever marry their first love."

"But some never forget her," said Miss Carew; "and I rather imagine Captain Lascelles is one of those. At some period of his life I can tell that a heavy storm has passed over him; peace and calmness have returned to his mind, but there are signs by which a close observer can discern that a great desolation has once been there. I can read, too, in your countenance, Mr. Nugent, that my surmises are correct; but you need not fear that you have destroyed any confidence, to no other should I dream of speaking as I am doing to you. But you are a friend of both, and I feel sure that Nelly's happiness is still dear to you, though I can no longer cherish my once fond hope that it was for ever to be secured by your faithful guardianship."

I was silent for a moment, for her remark took me by surprise.

"Then you knew all?" I inquired.

"Only from my own observation; but that was quite sufficient. I do hope my darling Nelly will be happy in the choice her heart has made; but, oh! I did so wish it had fallen on you; I should have had no fear then."

"You amaze me, Miss Carew!" I replied; "to dream of preferring me to Percy Lascelles! In no one way do I feel myself worthy to be compared to him,—only in my devoted love for Nelly will I not yield to him; he could not love her better than I did."

"The day may come when Nelly will feel this too —feel it when it may be too late. Should this ever happen, Mr. Nugent, prove to her the brother you have always been: I know that she will never want a friend while you are near her."

"Never!" I replied, earnestly; "but believe me, Miss Carew, she will be happy with Percy Lascelles; his disposition is noble and generous; he will love her well, and guard her tenderly. In her society his little peculiarities will soon wear away altogether—they are but trifles, not sufficient to endanger any woman's happiness."

"Perhaps not, if she were of a less impulsive nature than poor Nelly; but she will not give herself time for reflection, and will keenly feel slights that never were intended as such, and will brood silently over grievances that had better be met at once and boldly. Now, in her present dream of contentment, she sees little of this, and might not credit it if warned of it; but it will happen, for all that. Captain Lascelles loves her, and now lavishes time and attentions upon her that blind her to the real view of his character: he is not a man that will long be at the beck and call

of any woman; the time will come when his mind will recover its usual equilibrium, other duties and occupations will engross much of his thoughts, and his wife will feel that she is no longer his sole consideration. Nelly will not like this."

"But, Miss Carew, this is only what must happen to every woman after the first ardour of attachment is passed. I don't think Nelly would like to see Lascelles tied to her apron-string all day long; he will return to her with all the more *empressement* after their little separations. A soldier must leave his wife now and then."

"She wishes him to leave the army," said Miss Carew; "but he does not seem inclined to abandon his profession, and I advised her not to press the point just now."

"I know he is much attached to the 144th," I replied, "and he is also a devoted soldier; besides, there is now really some chance of seeing service, and for this Lascelles has long ardently pined."

"That may be all very well for him," said Miss Carew; "but consider the feelings of a wife who sees her husband leave her for all the dangers of an active campaign. I own that I do not wonder at her anxiety for him to quit the army, while he can honourably do so."

"She will not succeed, Miss Carew," I observed, decidedly. "Lascelles is every inch a true soldier; a life of indolence and inaction will never suit him. Nelly must prepare to share his glory when the time for great deeds arrives. It is now but a rumour, and may never be realized."

Miss Carew only shook her head, and just then Nelly and Lascelles entered from the garden, and our conversation was stopped.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MORE CHANGES.

"CHARLEY, mee boy, come along with me; you're the very fellow I want."

I was in the act of putting the finishing-strokes to a very elaborate toilette, when Barry unceremoniously invaded my retreat, and thus insisted on carrying me off to some place unknown.

"Am I?" I replied. "What am I wanted for?"

"To take care of me, my dear fellow, and prevent me from being totally victimized and plundered by the 'Thieves' Association' of pretty girls that comes off to-day."

"Oh! the Bazaar; I had quite forgotten it," I replied. "Turn out the contents of your purse, Ned, and leave them behind you; that will be your best safeguard."

"Och! if that was all that was necessary, sure that same would be easily done," said Barry, with a comical grimace; "but when a sweet creature, with two eyes like diamonds and lips like ripe strawberries, comes up, and says in her own winning way, 'Sure, Mr. Barry, you'll not be after refusing me now—you *will* buy this beau-ti-ful doll that I dressed all entirely

myself, and all its things come off and on; and, see, its eyes open and shut'—would you have me be the hard-hearted ogre that is to say, 'No, my angel, a miserable, lone bachelor like me has no need of such a beau-ti-ful doll.' Of course not; sure I'd buy up all the dolls on the premises only to pleasure her, the darling."

"Well, Barry, I'll go with you; but, mind you, don't ask me to lend you a sixpence, for I wont do it. We'd better write, 'Needy Insolvents' on a couple of cards, and stick them on our backs; perhaps people wont bother us then."

"Sure I wont buy one single thing, good, bad, or indifferent," said Barry, energetically; "not if my old grandmother, that's been dead and gone these twenty years, was to go down upon her knees to me, let alone the pretty girls we'll see this day. Now, I've said it. Hooray!"

"Mr. Barry," whispered a remarkably melodious voice, almost immediately on our entrance to the large room where the sale was held, "do come and patronize me; I've been watching so for you. Look at this lovely pincushion, only ten shillings. I am sure you know somebody that wants a pincushion."

The speaker was little Katey Connor, a sparkling brunette of nineteen, who was looking as bewitching as possible in the most intensely charming white lace bonnet, with bright geraniums inside; and who knew quite well that nobody could refuse anything tendered by that exquisite little hand in its pale primrose glove.

"Be firm, Barry," I whispered; but the caution came too late; a golden coin is glittering on Katey's tiny palm, and Barry is the proud possessor of such a pincushion!

"Mother of Moses!" he ejaculated, as he triumphantly regarded his prize. "Wont it look splendid on my dressing-table, all among the cigars and bills! The little darling, I'll think of her whenever I look at it; sure it's cheap at the price."

"I thought you were not to buy anything, Barry?"

"Sure, I meant not; and divil another of them shall tempt me—I'm steel to the backbone. Is it an anti macassor, my dear? and ye can't get rid of it? and those lovely fingers worked it! Sure I'll keep it while there's a rag of it left. Murther in Irish, Charley! carry me off from these beguiling young robbers. Will ye see me plundered before your very eyes?"

Mrs. Grant was presiding at a stall, assisted by several very pretty girls, who were doing their best to attract purchasers; and very successfully too, judging from the jingling sound I frequently heard, and the rapid diminishing of the contents of their counter. Barry and I attached ourselves to this fair group, and were employed as shopboys to our infinite satisfaction.

While engaged in getting up a raffle for a large worked chair, I espied my old friend Miss Kate O'Hara sitting demurely in a corner, engaged in a very promising-looking flirtation with a dashing cavalry officer.

"Good gracious! Mr. Nugent—who ever dreamt of seeing you? Have you been mashing any more potatoes lately?"

"No, Miss O'Hara. Has the gentleman with the big whiskers—"

"Now, stop this very minute;" and she blushed charmingly, and gave a side look at the individual to

whom she had been speaking. She then introduced me to him. He was "My cousin, Arthur de Lancey, of the —th Light." He had lately returned on sick leave from India; had paid a visit to his relations, the O'Haras, fallen in love with Kate, proposed, and been accepted; and the young lady was in town for the purpose of getting her *trousseau.*

I have been long silent about my worthy friend Major Thompson, and his little affair, but it was progressing most favourably; the gallant major and his fair inamorata were evidently to be exceptions to the rule of true love never running smooth; the current of their passion was as tranquil as a mill pond. My own impression was that the proceeding was already cut and dried; and I was in daily anticipation of an announcement that my services as groom's man would speedily be required, as I had long ago informed Major Thompson that I intended to fill this important position.

Miss Barham lived in the country at a considerable distance from Dublin; and as a daily visit was thereby rendered impossible, all the major's spare time was devoted to the composition of wonderful epistles that must have occupied the lady a very respectable time in their perusal. Of course his little *tendresse* was no secret in the regiment.

I fear I had been wicked enough to give facetious descriptions of how the major took the disease, and all his innocent wiles and machinations, so delightfully palpable to the very dullest of observers.

The clue once given, it was not very difficult to follow it out; and when the major began to sport light kids and brilliant ties, when there was something stronger than mere suspicion that he paid fre-

quent visits to a fashionable hair-cutting establishment, emerging from thence with his rather scanty locks curled, as Barry said, "within an inch of their life;" then great indeed was the interest and delectation of his brother officers, and many a quiet piece of fun was good-naturedly poked at him.

And so one day he made a clean breast of it, and allowed that it was "*une affaire finie*," and that he hoped soon to have the pleasure of introducing Mrs. Thompson to their acquaintance. He also told us that after his marriage he intended to leave the army, as neither his future wife nor himself wished to lead a roving life, but meant to settle down quietly, and live in peace and comfort for the remainder of their days.

"I shall never forget the old 144th," he remarked, with much feeling; "nor all the happy days I have spent with it; and never a man of the corps but shall find a warm welcome while John Thompson has a roof to cover his head. My wife and I will always be glad to see an old comrade at our board, and have a good talk over the old times. Many a merry hour may we yet have together."

We all heartily echoed his wish; and not a man in the regiment but lamented the departure of the worthy major.

"Begad! if I don't think a matrimonial fit has come over the regiment," said Captain Lacy, with emphasis; "something must be done to stop it before it goes any further. I wonder what the deuce the symptoms are, so as to take them in time?"

"Riding in the Phœnix with dark-haired damsels in killing wide-awakes, and sending them bouquets next morning—eh, Lacy? Where were you yesterday at four o'clock?" asked Captain Lee, knowingly.

"Oh! you are there, are you?" replied Lacy, laughing. "Well, saving your presence, you never were further from the mark. I have no matrimonial intentions in that quarter, I can assure you."

"But they have, let me tell you; and that may do equally well in the end. Mother Kearney is notoriously on the look-out."

"For eligibles—yes; but I do not come under that head. However, she is a civil old girl—gives capital feeds, of which I get more than my share; and that said dark-haired little Kearney is a very jolly little girl, but with a vast deal too much 'way' on her for my taste. Nothing should ever induce me to marry a fast woman, though they are capital fun now and then."

"I wonder what all the A—— girls are doing?" said Marsh. "They were a goodish lot, on the whole."

"Some one told me that little Fanny Thompson was married to a curate; some soft youth that she walked into in the old way; and now she drawls and turns up her eyes, and never hears a polka or a deux-temps without shuddering."

"Ah! sure, she was a nice little girl once," said Barry, with such a tremendous sigh, that we all went into fits of laughter.

"The eldest was the only one worth anything," observed Lacy. "Something might have been made of her, if she had been taken in hand sooner. I believe the man she ran away with ill-uses her shamefully; beats her, I hear, and behaves like a perfect brute."

"Do you know where they are?" I inquired.

"Somewhere on the Continent; and he gambles from morning to night. She supports herself by

teaching English in some school; but I believe he carries off every penny she makes."

Poor Eleanor!

I was present at Major Thompson's marriage, and saw him made the happiest of men.

We went down some little time previously, and took up our abode with a brother of Miss Barham's, who had a very comfortable house and a large family, which included two or three nice, merry daughters. While with them, we were fêted and made much of in a manner truly Irish, and a most agreeable fortnight or three weeks I spent in that hospitable neighbourhood; winding up a succession of dinners and balls with the grand *dénouement* of the wedding, soon after which I returned to Dublin.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FLORENCE.

I ARRIVED pretty late in the afternoon; and among the many notes of invitation lying on my table there was one to a ball at Lady T——'s, which was to come off that very night.

Lascelles informed me that Nelly was going, and that he had half-promised to look in for an hour. "But now you have come back, old fellow," he said, laughing, "I am not quite so sure that I shall put in an appearance. I never dance, so am of no use; and you are ten per cent. better in the cloaking department."

"Oh! Charley, I am so glad to see you," said Nelly, eagerly; "but where is Percy? Have you not brought him with you?" and she looked bitterly disappointed.

"He is perhaps coming later," I replied; "but you know he is a sad lazy fellow about balls."

She made no reply, but there was a slight flush and a quivering of the lip, and then she began to question me about my country visit, and to inquire how the wedding went off.

"Do you know, Charley," she said, presently, "I

am so particularly anxious for Percy to come to-night; there is a cousin of his staying with Lady T——, such a beautiful woman, and so very agreeable; I have perfectly lost my heart to her. She knows of our engagement," continued Nelly, with a bright blush, "and she begged to be introduced to me."

"What is her name?" I inquired, rather drily.

"Mrs. Vincent. She is a widow, with one little girl; and I believe her husband was killed accidentally soon after their marriage. I wonder Percy never mentioned her."

"Where is she?" I asked, looking round the room, where I saw no trace of the beautiful Florence.

"She does not dance, and is sitting in the conservatory. I have been having quite a long talk with her; and I rather think there has been some family quarrel, or something of that kind, for she seems slightly to dread meeting Percy; and I wished so much to see him, and beg him to speak kindly to her, poor thing! She takes such an interest in him—and in me—and said she could never feel as a stranger towards his future wife."

Ah! Nelly—beware!

"By and bye she returned, and said to me, "Charley, come with me and be introduced to Mrs. Vincent. She has recognised you as a travelling companion, and says you rendered her a great service."

I accompanied her to the dimly-lighted conservatory; and there, on a low chair, the subdued rays of a soft alabaster lamp fell on the magnificent form and features of this too lovely woman.

A black velvet robe encircled her figure, and fell in sweeping folds around her; the skirt was open in front, and displayed a rich white satin petticoat,

covered with costly lace, while more of the same graceful fabric adorned her neck and arms. A tiara, composed of one row of splendid diamonds, rested on her queenly brow; and a bracelet of the same precious stones graced one fair arm, while the other was clasped by a broad black velvet ribbon, to which was fastened the portrait of a young and very handsome man, in the uniform of a sailor.

She might have been an empress from her stately and unrivalled beauty—a beauty which eclipsed that of every other woman present. Fair and graceful as was Lady Duneden in her pure white crape and wreath of blue convolvulus, she was for the moment overshadowed by this glorious specimen of perfect loveliness; though, when the eye recovered from its temporary bewilderment, there was a something in the gentle glance and pure confiding expression of Nelly O'Brien one would not choose to exchange for charms ten thousand times as glowing as those of the radiant Florence Vincent.

But very beautiful she certainly was; and there was a magic fascination in her smile, and in the deep glance of those expressive eyes, that very few could resist.

Frankly she met my gaze as I advanced to her side; and then bestowing one of those brilliant smiles on me, as I bowed in reply to our introduction, she said, in tones of liquid softness,—

"You see I have not forgotten you, Mr. Nugent. I said we should probably meet again."

Now, all my life I have had an unfortunate regard for truth, that has made me enemies on more than one occasion.

I felt that I was behaving horribly rudely in not

instantly assuring this lovely creature that I was intensely delighted at meeting her again; but then the real state of the case was, that I was most seriously disturbed by her presence, and would have given much had it been in my power to ensure her removal without loss of time to a spot as far distant as possible from the abode where she now was.

My mind misgave me, that evil would come of her visit; and I most sincerely wished she had never landed in the Green Isle. Something of all this must have been written in my countenance, for the lady looked up rather surprised at such an unusual silence from a young gentleman whom she had found glib enough of tongue on another occasion; and, as her eyes met mine, what she read there made hers glitter rather coldly, and a faint contraction for an instant marked that beautiful brow.

When she spoke again, it was in a different tone.

I had stammered 'out some incoherent reply, and made an inquiry as to the welfare of her little girl.

She glanced round—there was no one in the conservatory near enough to overhear our conversation—and placing her rounded elbow on the edge of a small fountain, close to which she was seated, Mrs. Vincent rested her head on her hand, and gazed at me steadily for a few moments.

"You are not glad to meet me again, Mr. Nugent—nay, do not interrupt me—I see it quite well. Why is this? Have I in any way offended you? If so, it was quite unintentional, and I regret it."

"Indeed, Mrs. Vincent, you have not offended me at all. I was only a little surprised at seeing you, and——"

"Not at all pleased," she said, quietly. "I saw

it at once. Now, I have not offended you, you say; you must therefore have heard something to my disadvantage. Will you tell me what it is?"

I felt in the most dreadful quandary, and what to do I knew not.

Mrs. Vincent had seen at once that Lady Duneden was perfectly ignorant of her previous history; and if Percy Lascelles had not confided this secret to the woman he was about to marry, was it likely he had imparted it to so young a confidant as myself.

"Will you tell me?" she again asked, in a pleading voice. "There is something, I see; and I much wish to know what it is."

"This is a very clever woman," I said to myself; "I shall never be able to deceive her, so she shall have the truth. Percy may be angry, but I think it may be the safest plan in the end."

"There has been a struggle," she said, quietly, as if in answer to my thoughts; "but now you are going to tell me all."

"I am, Mrs. Vincent," I replied; "because I think it is better to do so; and you will then understand my conduct, which must otherwise appear unpardonably rude."

"Oh! I am not at all offended," she remarked, half-smiling. "But I am all impatience to know the cause of the very sour reception you gave me."

"When I tell you that Percy Lascelles is my very great friend—that I know all the history of his past life—may I not feel that your meeting must be a painful one, to him at least?"

"What do you know?" she almost gasped, becoming at the same time very pale; "tell me what you know."

"Enough to wish that he and you might never meet again to recall the remembrance of the wrongs he has suffered at your hands. The wounds are healed now, Mrs. Vincent; God grant they may never be re-opened. Be merciful, and spare him—and her!"

"Spare her!" she exclaimed almost fiercely. "Oh! I forgot, he is about to be married;" and she clenched her hands tightly together, and closed her eyes for a moment as if in great agony.

"She knows nothing of it at all," I added; "he has never told her, and she loves him very dearly; it would break her heart to be told that he had loved another first."

"She shall know nothing from me," she replied; "nor shall she suspect it. I shall be here but a short time, and then I shall leave them, and never again cross their path; but one object I came hither to attain, and you must aid me to accomplish it." She looked at me earnestly.

"What is it?" I inquired; "you may command me in any way that will not injure Percy."

"I must see him," she replied; "see him alone, and obtain his forgiveness, without which I can never know peace."

"I cannot promise this," I replied. "I do not think it would be wise."

"Yes!" she exclaimed eagerly; "it would let us once more be friends, instead of the bitter enemies we parted. Oh! Mr. Nugent, do this for me!" and she clasped her beautiful hands together, and looked beseechingly into my face. "If you knew the heavy load of misery I have to bear in thinking of my conduct to Percy, you would pity me instead of looking coldly as you do now. All those long years I have

borne it in silence, for in our respective positions I dared not venture to appeal to him; but now that it is all a thing of the past, and another has filled the place I once occupied in his heart, now surely he may pardon me, and relieve the frightful misery I have so long endured. This is why I am here."

I gazed at her in puzzled silence. Truly, if this woman were acting a part, I was indeed deceived; but no, she could not feign that ghastly countenance, those accents of agony, the scalding tears that fell unheeded from her imploring eyes.

"All that is most painful he has probably forgotten," she continued; "but it has left a deeply injured feeling behind, and it is this I wish to remove. We are near relations, and had once a very kindly feeling towards one another, as such; let this return, let us be friends once more, and you will have done a good deed, Mr. Nugent, for which your own heart will ever cheer you by its approval."

"I will think of it," I replied; "more I cannot now promise."

People were entering the conservatory, and our conversation was necessarily at an end.

Mrs. Vincent rose from her seat, and opening a side door she escaped in that way to her own room, where she soon effaced all traces of her previous agitation, and appeared in a short time brilliant and fascinating as ever.

The result was that Percy and she had an interview.

What took place on the occasion I cannot precisely say; but Percy did not return to his usual composure all that day, and he made no allusion to what had taken place, further than to inform me that his cousin and he were once more on friendly terms.

I now heard no more of her intended departure; and if she had ever really meant to go, she had clearly changed her plan now; for little Edith and her nurse came over to Dublin, and Mrs. Vincent took apartments of her own, and appeared to meditate a stay of some duration. She and Lady Duneden became very intimate; it was a pleasure to Nelly to know and love any of Percy's relations, and she liked this charming Mrs. Vincent for her own sake, and seldom formed any plan without consulting or including her.

I was naturally a great deal with them, and from the first Florence treated me with a civility that was so marked as to be almost unnatural. Beautiful and engaging as she undeniably was, from the moment I learnt that she was Florence Templeton I conceived an aversion for her that I could never thoroughly overcome; and I am sure she felt and knew this. There were times when I too succumbed to the power of her wonderful fascination, and almost marvelled that I could dislike one so irresistibly charming; but when calmer moments returned and reason resumed its sway, the old repulsion, the old dread, once more filled my heart, and led me to mistrust even when I was most dazzled.

No precise time had been fixed for the marriage of Lady Duneden and Lascelles; but I understood it was only delayed until the Fitzgerald family returned to Ireland. They had been abroad for some little time on account of the health of Mrs. Fitzgerald, and were still to remain absent for a month or two.

I regretted this exceedingly, on more accounts than one; for had Norah and Julia Fitzgerald been at home, Nelly would have been less entirely thrown on Mrs. Vincent for companionship.

Her worthy relative, Miss Carew, was about this time called away to attend a dying sister; Mrs. Grant and her husband were absent in Scotland; therefore she may almost be said to have depended on Florence for intimate female society; and in her position it was more especially desirable that another lady should frequently be her companion.

And so it came to pass that the two beautiful young widows were almost inseparable; and the woman whom of all others I should have most objected to bring into contact with Nelly O'Brien, became her chosen associate and bosom friend.

They went everywhere together, spent many days at each other's houses, and were soon on a footing of the most perfect familiarity.

This result appeared to afford the greatest satisfaction to Lascelles; and on more than one occasion he made some observation of the kind, which I did not very cordially reciprocate.

What I dreaded I scarcely knew; but I did not like the strong influence Mrs. Vincent was gradually acquiring over the gentle Nelly. It seemed to me that Nelly did not consult me so often as formerly; and that on more than one occasion she yielded to the persuasions of her friend when Percy and I had both urged her to act differently to what she did.

Now I had yielded my place in Nelly's regard to the rightful usurper, Percy; but it hurt me to find that a stranger was gradually becoming more to her than myself, and was slowly and steadily injuring me in her estimation as a friend and counsellor.

I observed, too, that she led her to engage more than ever in mixed and gay society, which was little

to Percy's taste, though he never distinctly objected to it. Much more than formerly, she encouraged the attentions of those idle danglers who will always hover round a young and pretty woman when her manner is not such as to repel them; and Lady Duneden's drawing-room was now frequently invaded by men whom I cared not to see on such familiar terms with one so good and innocent as herself. The character of our once pleasant riding parties was now entirely changed, as three or four idle cavaliers were usually added to the party, greatly to the discomfiture of Percy and myself.

True, his place was still at the right hand of Lady Duneden, but her attention was constantly claimed by others, and Percy was not the man to mix in the light and flippant conversation usually maintained on such occasions; so he generally preserved an unbroken silence, often falling back with Mrs. Vincent or myself, as though he felt himself a restraint on the gay equestrians in front.

All this I did not like.

Still Nelly and he were as fondly attached as ever; and often after one of those very rides I have seen them stroll into the garden and linger long there, and when they have returned, there was that light in his dark eye and flush on her soft cheek that told of love true and unclouded.

On one occasion of this kind, I was engaged in reading, while Mrs. Vincent stood at the drawing-room window, and I knew she was watching the lovers as they slowly sauntered up and down.

Curiosity prompted me to steal a glance at her, and I was shocked to see the expression of concentrated

hate and anguish that lowered on her brow and glared in angry flashes from her eyes.

Again I fixed my attention on the volume before me, but the memory of that wild, fierce look haunted me incessantly, and awoke a strange misgiving in my mind. But when I glanced up again she was all sweetness and serenity; no trace of the emotion I had so lately witnessed was visible—but it had been there.

Her manner to Lascelles was perfect, no fault could possibly be found with it; it was a mixture of familiar frankness and gentle dignity; and Percy in turn treated her with all the consideration and regard due to a cousin; the nicest observer could never have discovered that their intercourse had once been very different to what it was now.

Lascelles had previously told me of her unrivalled musical powers; but the first time I heard her I thought even his praise had been cold.

Her voice was one of those rich liquid contraltos that remind you of the French expression of having "*larmes dans la voix;*" its melting tones once heard were never to be forgotten.

She sang most of the fine German and Italian music, and sang it admirably; but I almost preferred her in ballads; it may be because I like them best.

There were two or three dreamy, old-fashioned things I never heard any one sing but herself; and to those I was never weary of listening. She sang them most exquisitely, with a genuine feeling and pathos that went to one's very heart.

I remember one particular evening that Percy and I spent with her and Nelly.

We found the two ladies chatting in the drawing-room, with no other light than that afforded by the bright fire close to which their low chairs were drawn.

"Florence was just going to sing when you entered," said Lady Duneden. "Beg her to do so still; music is so charming by this dim light."

We joined our entreaties to Nelly's, and Lascelles opened the piano and placed the music-stool in readiness. He was passionately fond of music, as I have before mentioned; and as Mrs. Vincent took her place at the instrument, he seated himself in an arm-chair close by.

"What shall I sing?" she said, striking a few soft minor chords; and there was a slight bend of her head in the direction of Percy.

"Something sad and sentimental," replied Nelly; "it suits this time best. Oh! that beautiful thing you sang to me the other morning, 'The Name' I think you called it."

"I do not think I can remember it," said Florence, with a little hesitation; "I sing it very seldom."

Something in the tone of her voice arrested my attention.

"Oh, yes, I am sure you can," said Nelly, eagerly. "You remembered it quite well then, and it is so lovely. Do try it." She played a few bars of accompaniment, and then she sang—

### THE NAME.

Thy name was once the magic spell
By which my heart was bound,
And burning dreams of life and love
Were wakened by that sound.

My heart beat high when stranger tongues,
With idle praise or blame,
Awoke its deepest thrill of life
To tremble at thy name.

Long years, long years have passed away,
And altered is thy brow;
And we who once so fondly met,
Must meet as strangers now.

The friends of yore come round me still,
But speak no more of thee;
'Tis idle e'en to wish it now,
For what art thou to me?

Yet still thy name—thy treasured name
This lonely bosom fills,
Like an echo that has lost its voice
Among the distant hills;

Which still with melancholy note
Keeps faintly lingering on;
While the joyous note that woke it first
Is gone—for ever gone!

I can never describe the manner in which she sang those words; the agonizing truth of expression which distinguished every note and sentiment was at times almost painful to hear; her voice was like the heart-broken wail of some mourning spirit. I trembled for the effect it might have on at least one of her listeners; for who could hear that bitter lament, and not feel that it came from the very inmost depth of a passionate nature?

There was perfect silence when she had finished.

Percy's head was supported on his hand, and he had shaded his face so that its expression was hidden from me, but he never uttered a word; it was Nelly who spoke first.

"Dear Florence, I never heard any one sing like you; it is most wonderful, but it is very sad. I am sure you have put us all into low spirits; I feel quite ready to cry, and Percy has never looked up yet. Give us one other song, not a lively one, but something rather less affecting than the last."

Again that magical voice rang through the echoing room, and held us spell-bound by its thrilling tones.

It was the exquisite adieu of Josephine to Napoleon; and she sang it all but the last verse, which she omitted. With what intense feeling she rendered the lines—

> Will she watch when a cloud passes over thy brow,
> And strive to chase it as I have done?
> Forgetting all save the thought that now
> It is hers to console thee, beloved one!

In particular the two last were sung with an intonation that brought a flood of indignant resentment to my brow, for it seemed to me that something here was very far from right. Sentiments like those, sung as they had just been by Florence Vincent, were not such as she should have sung to Percy Lascelles; more especially in the presence of his future wife.

The choice of those ballads might have been accidental; in the case of "The Name," Lady Duneden had herself requested it; but the second was Mrs. Vincent's own selection, and I did not approve of it. But a moment had I for these reflections.

Again the innocent Nelly warmly expressed her thanks.

While she was speaking, Florence rose from the piano, and Percy started up hastily and approached as though to aid her in closing it. He pressed down the lid with some violence; and bending over her as she

lingered there, I heard him whisper, in a voice whose agitated hoarseness I shall never forget, "Florence! never sing those songs again—never!"

She raised her eyes and gave him one quiet glance.

His back was towards me, and I could not see his face; but for one single instant a faint smile, like the lurid gleam before the tempest, curled the graceful lip of the enchantress; then turning calmly from the instrument, she joined Lady Duneden at the fireplace, and began immediately to converse upon indifferent subjects.

There was something in all this that gave me a feeling of great uneasiness. Why did Mrs. Vincent thus torture Percy by allusions so marked? Why did she seek to recall scenes and memories so long passed away and forgotten, and which it was more than desirable should ever remain so?

Was it merely to gratify a morbid sensation of vanity? Did it please her proud heart to know that the apparently callous demeanour of Percy was only assumed, and that, when the chord was struck that reached the sealed depths of his nature, then feelings, not dead but sleeping, were painfully aroused, and keenly vibrated to the skilfully applied touch? Or, had she any other, and still baser motive?

I could not then determine what her designs might be, for she was too deep to be easily read; but I resolved to watch her narrowly. For some days after the scene I have described, Percy decidedly shunned Mrs. Vincent, and rather to my surprise she did not seem to mind it; indeed she appeared desirous of avoiding him herself; though, when they did meet, her manner was precisely as before; and ere a week

had passed, the slight cloud, awkwardness, or whatever it was, had entirely vanished; no one but myself having apparently perceived it.

One good effect almost appeared to have been produced by it, which I was delighted to observe—Percy was kinder, more watchful of Nelly than he had ever been. It was as though the glimpse he had obtained of the wild passionate nature of his early love had but bound him more closely to that pure, confiding heart that trusted in him; and once more he was devoted as in the first days of their engagement, and Florence seemed less than nothing to him. But alas! this improvement was but temporary; a powerful spirit was at work, who had sworn that the evil deed should be accomplished, and scrupled at nothing that would tend to the fulfilment of her dark designs.

The 21st Hussars were still stationed in Dublin; and about this time they received a distinguished addition, in the person of Sir Ralph de Courcy, a baronet of ancient family, who had lately held a commission in the Guards. He was a very handsome man, with extremely fascinating manners, and a reputation of the nature that would have made the father of a family of young daughters hesitate about admitting him as a frequent visitor to the domestic circle; but in society he was a most welcome addition, and he soon became quite the rage in the gay *réunions* of Dublin and the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Vincent had the advantage of a previous acquaintance with him, and through her introduction he became known to Lady Duneden, and an occasional visitor at her house. He was constantly in the train of the two beautiful widows; and, as Lady Duneden was understood to be already appropriated, it soon

became a prevalent report that Mrs. Vincent was the prize he hoped one day to obtain. He accompanied them to all public places, rode with them constantly, though I soon observed that his post was much oftener by Nelly's side than by Florence's; and several times Percy was evidently annoyed at this, and quitting his own position, he fell behind with Mrs. Vincent, and rode by her side for the rest of the day.

Mrs. Vincent never danced, nor did Percy; and when by Nelly's persuasions he was induced to accompany them to some of the numerous balls then going on, he was pretty sure to be found sitting by Florence, or leaning over her chair, speaking or silent, just as was his inclination; for his cousin left him entirely to himself, and accommodated herself to his mood, whatever it might be.

In all this I do not exonerate Nelly, who certainly did not watch each turn and peculiarity of Percy's mind as carefully as Florence did. Young, beautiful, and immensely admired as she was, was it so very unnatural that the frank-hearted Irish girl—for she was little more—should be slightly intoxicated by the incense and adulation that she everywhere encountered? She had been so long unused to gaiety and pleasure, that her heart rebounded, as it were, when the pressure of trial was removed; and she was perhaps thoughtless in her innocent joy and gratification. Formerly she had been hurt by the frequent refusals of Percy, or his unwillingness to accompany her when she went into society; now he went much more readily, and did not appear so very impatient to quit it. But she gave no heed to the manner in which his evenings were spent; she did not observe that his place was ever, and as a matter of course, by the side of his

beautiful and fascinating cousin; she did not see the bright gleam that for an instant lighted up the lustrous eyes of Florence, to be immediately succeeded by her usual look of sleepy indifference. To all this she was blind.

And now some business of my father's necessitated my crossing over to England for a short time. Before I went I had a long talk with Nelly; and some faint warnings I endeavoured to give her, without raising suspicions in that warm heart by speaking out my fears too plainly. Perhaps it had been better had I used less caution, and been more explicit in my language; but I meant it for the best.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON.

My business over, I was about returning to Dublin, when I received the following letter from Nelly, in reply to one I had written her to announce my speedy arrival:—

"Dear Charley,

"I am so glad you are coming back, for it seems very long since you went away, and I miss you more than I can tell you.

"I feel to have no friend when you are gone. Miss Carew has never returned yet, and even to her I cannot say what I can to you.

"I know you have never liked Florence. She says you are jealous of my liking for her, and I fancied that might have prejudiced you against her; but, dear Charley, you had no cause to think that. I shall never value any friend as I do you. Indeed, you may believe this. But I don't understand what has come over us all lately. I cannot say what it is that is wrong, and yet I feel there is a difference. Percy is very kind, very affectionate, and Florence too; but I do not think he should yield to her what he has re-

fused to me, nor should she let him do so. And once or twice he has consulted her about something when I was there, and he did not ask me what I thought; and, God forgive me, Charley, if I judged her wrongly, but I think she was pleased to see that I looked annoyed. She said afterwards that, being his cousin, he sometimes appealed to her from the force of old association; but I did not believe her, and she saw I did not. We were a little cool at first, but it is all made up now; and perhaps she did not mean anything.

"I am staying with Florence just now, and we have been out so much; and there is a talk of a charade party, which is creating an immense sensation. There are always so many people here consulting about it, and Sir Ralph de Courcy is constantly here; and Percy does not like him, which I cannot understand, for he is so very agreeable and gentlemanly. He is very attentive to Florence, and yet I do not think there will ever be anything between them; she does not seem to care for him.

"And now, Charley, there is a question which I shall ask you when we meet. It has occurred to me once or twice lately—Did Percy ever wish to marry Florence? I cannot help thinking he did. She has clearly some great influence over him—greater than I ever had, or I fear shall ever have; and then he dislikes Sir Ralph de Courcy, who evidently admires Florence. I rather think, Charley, that you know something about it; and if so, you must tell me. I am not jealous. I should despise myself were I to be so mean, and I know that Percy loves me well, but she can do more with him than I can; and oh! her beautiful voice! what pleasure he has in listening to

it'. He is so passionately fond of music, and I can never give him this pleasure!

"Dear Charley, I have surely become very wicked lately. I know I am very unhappy at times, and often do things I have regretted afterwards; but surely I am not becoming jealous and envious, two such hateful qualities; and two or three times Percy and I have rather disagreed about trifles, but even Florence allowed I was in the right; but when you come, you shall tell me what you think, for I shall always hear the truth from you.

"Ever, dear Charley,

"Your affectionate

"NELLY."

This letter gave me great pain, and naturally enough confirmed all my previous suspicions.

I reached Dublin early in the forenoon; and, after reporting myself, and going through a few necessary arrangements, I proceeded to call on Lady Duneden; having the excuse of a small packet for her which had been committed to my charge.

She and Mrs. Vincent were in the drawing-room; and I found I had just missed Percy, who had been gone only a few minutes. Nelly was sitting in a favourite lounging-chair, her head thrown back on the quilted cushion in rather a scornful fashion, while she played nervously and angrily with her watch-chain.

There was a deeper flush than usual on her fair cheek, and her eyes were brilliant and glittering; her serenity had clearly been much disturbed, why, or by whom, I had yet to learn.

Mrs. Vincent was engaged in some fancy-work, which she was pursuing with great apparent composure; and after my reception was over, she resumed her employment.

"Better consult Mr. Nugent," she said, quietly addressing Nelly. "Now he is here, I am sure he will be happy to afford you the benefit of his valuable advice."

"I require nobody's advice," said Nelly, haughtily. "In this matter I am quite competent to judge for myself."

Mrs. Vincent merely elevated her beautiful eyebrows in reply, and bent assiduously over her work.

"I am aware that Percy and you would kindly reduce me to a nonentity between you," continued Nelly, bitterly; "but I have still the right to please myself; and I am not disposed to yield it quite so thoroughly as you wish."

Was it Nelly O'Brien who spoke? I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses, and my great amazement was written in my countenance.

"Shall I tell Mr. Nugent the cause of our little dispute?" asked the fair Florence, blandly. "Perhaps I had better do so."

"As you please; I am quite indifferent," replied Lady Duneden, settling her sweet features into a more determined expression.

"We are getting up some charades," said Mrs. Vincent, addressing me; "and Captain Lascelles has strong objections to Lady Duneden's being one of the performers. She, as you perceive, is desirous of joining in the amusement, naturally enough too; there is no harm in it, but—"

"I care nothing at all about it," said Nelly, interrupting her. "Had Percy begged me to give up the idea, I should have done it at once; but to state his objections to you, and not to myself, was conduct I

will not endure; more especially as he never said a word until he heard that Sir Ralph de Courcy was in the list of performers."

Florence slightly shrugged her shoulders, and said in a soothing voice—

"You see, dear, Percy is decidedly a little jealous of Sir Ralph; you always advocate his cause so warmly."

"And I do like Sir Ralph," exclaimed Nelly, decidedly; "I have no cause to do otherwise. I always find him most polite and gentlemanly."

"No doubt of that, dear; he admires you immensely, and small blame to him, as they say in this country. But, naturally enough, that does not tend to increase Percy's liking for him."

"Nonsense," replied Nelly, sharply; "you know well enough that Sir Ralph has really very little to do with the matter; he is much more your friend than mine."

"How can you say so, dear?" said Florence, reproachfully. "Has not Percy more than once complained of his attentions—and you know Sir Ralph always rides with you now."

"And pray with whom does Percy ride?" inquired Nelly.

"Now, dear Lady Duneden, I think we shall drop the subject," said Mrs. Vincent; "it is not a very pleasant one. I shall leave you with Mr. Nugent. Perhaps his arguments may prevail where mine have failed."

She bowed gracefully as she spoke, and then quitted the room.

There was an interval of silence, Nelly still playing

nervously with her chain; then she raised her eyes and laughed bitterly as she met the grieved expression of mine.

"Nelly, what is all this?" I exclaimed. "I cannot understand it. I can scarcely believe it is you I see before me."

"That is not very surprising," she replied, mockingly, "for at times I am really doubtful of my own identity. I told you something had come over us all; some spell is at work:" and again she slightly affected to laugh; but, poor little thing, the effort was too great, her overstrung nerves gave way, and next moment her head was buried in the cushion, and she was weeping and sobbing like a weary child; while I watched her tenderly and in silence, knowing that this wild sorrow would relieve her heart, and wash away the bitter feelings that now reigned in it.

Soon her heavy sobs ceased, and lifting her tearful eyes from the pillow, she whispered softly, "It was your kind, pitying face, Charley, that upset me; but it has done me good."

"And now tell me all, Nelly," I said, gently. "What is this disagreement between you and Percy?"

"Charley, she is more to him than I am—I see it—I feel it. Once he loved her; was it not so, Charley?—tell me."

"You must ask Percy that question, Nelly," I replied; "I cannot answer it."

"No need," she answered; "you have said enough to convince me that I have guessed rightly. But he loves me best now; I am sure of that. It is her influence over him that makes me so unhappy. Oh! that I had never seen her."

Too truly did I echo that wish.

"Other people have noticed it, too," continued Nelly; "Percy should not expose me to remarks of that kind."

"They were very impertinent people who made them," I replied.

"That may be," she added; "but they meant kindly."

"Nelly, for my sake, and to please me, you will abandon this charade."

She flushed high, and there was a momentary struggle.

"For my sake."

She placed her little hand in mine. "For you, Charley, I will do it." And she kept her word.

A day or two after this, Nelly told me that she and Florence were quite good friends again; and that she believed her intentions to have been good after all.

"She allows that Percy's disposition is rather an imperious one," said Nelly, "and agrees with me that it has lately become more so; indeed, I told her plainly that she had helped to spoil him. And so we are going to take him in hand, and bring him a little into bounds;" and she laughed merrily as she said so.

"Take care, Nelly," I replied; "Percy will not stand much trifling."

"It is anything but trifling," she said, gaily. "It is serious and sober earnest."

"Then be more careful still," I replied.

"Nelly," said Lascelles, a day or two later, "will you go this afternoon with me to Corry's about your portrait; there are a few little things he wished to arrange."

"I would willingly," she replied; "but Sir Ralph de Courcy is coming to ride with us."

Percy's brow darkened.

"Does he come to ride with *you?*"

"With Florence and me; and Florence will hardly like to ride alone. It will break up the party if I cannot accompany them."

Now opposition rather annoyed Percy, more especially as he very much disliked the baronet in question.

"Can you not put off riding for once?" he inquired; "Sir Ralph is no such stranger that you cannot use this liberty with him."

"And by the same token why cannot my portrait wait for a day," said Nelly; "it will not run away, I suppose?"

"I am answered," replied Percy, shortly, and taking up a book he affected to read; but I saw that he never turned over a page.

"Shall you go with us?" said Nelly, addressing him.

"Certainly not," replied Percy, coldly; "I am going to Corry's. Sir Ralph will escort you."

"Oh! very well," said Nelly, not even raising her eyes as Percy rose and walked into the next room, a kind of boudoir that communicated with the drawing-room.

Florence was absent when this little scene took place, but she came in almost immediately.

"How is it settled?" she whispered.

"We ride, of course," said Nelly, carelessly. "Percy is going to Mr. Corry's."

"Will he not come with us?" inquired Mrs. Vincent. "Oh! surely he will."

"No, he refuses," replied Nelly. "Oh! pray do not urge him," she added, as Mrs. Vincent made a

movement as though she were going into the other room. "We can do very well without him."

"But he will be savage," replied Florence, laughing. "I never doubted you would yield, and that our ride was at an end."

"You were mistaken there," said Nelly, calmly; "I never meant to yield."

"Then I shall go and dress," said Mrs. Vincent; and she immediately quitted the drawing-room.

Clearly, she had known Percy's wish that Nelly should accompany him to the artist's, and had in some measure instigated the unwary girl to deny his request. This much I gathered from her own words.

Scarcely was the door closed behind her than I went up to Nelly and besought her to accede to Percy's desire before it was too late to rescind her refusal.

"Why should I yield to him in this matter?" she exclaimed, impatiently. "There is more reason for him to alter his plans; ours was a regular engagement, and could not be broken without rudeness."

"Sir Ralph will not be offended, Nelly," I replied. "Your excuse is a most natural one; and for once I am sure Mrs. Vincent will ride with him herself. She has her servant; and if she has any scruples, I will readily join the party."

"No, Charley; I will not always give way to Percy. Besides, he was not civil in his refusal to ride with us. He is playing the tyrant too soon."

"Dear Nelly," I persevered, "who has put such an absurd idea into your head? Percy a tyrant!"

"He is becoming something very like one," she replied, pettishly.

"You are mistaken, Nelly; he loves you much too well for anything of the kind. He was a little pro-

voked just now, and you spoke hastily. But think over it calmly, and I am sure you will do what he wishes."

"And why is it always Percy that is to be considered, and never me? Surely I may have a little of my own way now and then; and on this occasion I mean to take it. Your intention is very good, Charley, I know that; but you are blinded to the reasonable view of the matter by your zeal for Percy. There is Sir Ralph, and I have yet to dress. Tell him we shall be down immediately."

The horses were brought to the door, and to my surprise Percy's was among them.

"Percy is going, after all," observed Mrs. Vincent, in reply to my wondering look. "It was nonsense being annoyed about such a trifle; so I persuaded him to change his mind. Mr. Corry can wait till to-morrow."

A slight sound made me turn my head, and there stood Nelly, pale and composed, but with a look in her eyes not good to see.

She was gone before Florence perceived her; and, descending the stairs, she mounted her horse with the assistance of Sir Ralph de Courcy, and at once rode slowly off with him.

Mrs. Vincent and Percy followed. I had not ordered my horse, so could not join them; but indeed I should not much have cared to do so, judging from the lowering frown on Percy's forehead.

This was only one of many little tiffs that were constantly occurring. Trifles they were, all of them, at first; but they were skilfully fomented by one whose heart was in the evil work, and day by day the breach gradually, but surely widened. Often there were re-

conciliations, sometimes apparently brought about by that same treacherous influence, but no thorough explanation ever took place; and I could only look sadly on, and trace the progress of the mischief I was powerless to check.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE FIRST QUARREL.

At last there came a misunderstanding more serious than any that had yet occurred.

I have never yet described Sir Ralph de Courcy, and must give the reader some idea of his outward man and inward disposition. He was a very handsome man, there was no doubt of that; tall, fair, and extremely aristocratic in features and bearing; but I had no peculiar fancy for his expression, which was, at times, extremely supercilious and irritating, especially when you happened to differ from him in opinion.

To ladies his manner was remarkably ingratiating, as his disdainful manner completely vanished when in their society, and gave place to an air of deference and assiduity that procured him many fair advocates where the rougher sex were occasionally provoked into expressing rather uncomplimentary sentiments respecting him.

From the moment of their first acquaintance he had declared his unqualified admiration of Lady Duneden: and when he discovered that his attentions did

not particularly gratify Percy, he certainly rather increased than diminished them.

Now, Percy, in a general way, was by no means a squire of dames.

He was not a proficient in those thousand delicate little attentions that so win their way to a woman's favour; when he loved and respected a woman, there was no sacrifice he would not have made on her behalf: but he was not at all times waiting to act as bouquet-holder; he was not an adept in the use of the fan; he had neither a sentimental line ready for every occasion, nor did he write original poetry; and he was not incessantly on the *qui vive* to place chairs, pick up handkerchiefs, adjust cloaks, and perform all the numberless little offices that a pretty woman (or an ugly one either, for that matter) loves to receive, as a tribute due to her sex and charms.

Now Sir Ralph understood all these little arts to perfection; and to great skill in this particular line very much of his popularity was owing; for where he pleased to make himself very agreeable, there is no doubt he could be eminently so.

Nelly O'Brien was an impulsive, warm-hearted Irishwoman; open as the day herself, she looked not for evil motives in the conduct of others; she was young—lovely—frankly happy in the glow of bright sunshine that now lay thick on her innocent life. Admiration did not make her look coldly on those who thronged around her; nor did those *petit soins*, the tribute men so willingly pay to beauty, make her ruby lip curl with proud disdain.

She was pretty—she knew it—and she had no manner of objections to the pleasant dominion she thereby acquired. Therefore she accepted her tribute frankly

and graciously, after the manner of a young queen; and though the loving faith of her heart of hearts was fondly reserved for the man she had chosen from among all others, yet had she a winning smile and a soft word for those that she liked; and high among those so favoured ranked that gallant captain of Hussars, Sir Ralph de Courcy. In her very openness and guilelessness, Nelly was preparing pitfalls for herself; for was there not one whose fondest wish was that a net should be woven around this fair young creature, from whose skilfully hidden meshes there should be no escape? Alas! and alas! such an one there was.

A change has come over us all—a great change; too surely do I see and know it.

Silently and steadily an evil influence has been at work—already the poisonous seed so secretly and treacherously sown—already is it producing its baneful fruit.

There is a deep gloom on Percy's noble forehead—his eyes light not up as of old—his smile is rare, and but lip-deep—he is more prone to take offence—less kindly and forgiving than is his usual nature.

Sorrowfully I recognise the difference; Percy is still my true, affectionate friend; but there is a shadow of constraint over our daily intercourse, scarcely to be observed—scarcely to be described; but I feel it; and we have not for many a long day had one of our old, social colloquies over our much-loved pipes. I missed them very much at first; but I almost feel as if they would be awkward now.

Fairer, brighter, more than ever gay and joyous in her bearing, seems Nelly O'Brien; a playful smile is ever hovering about her arching lips, merry and

bantering words are ever at her command; here, at least, is nothing dark or doubting.

"What a bright creature Lady Duneden is!" exclaims many an admiring spectator, as the lovely young countess is whirled past him in the dance, or her sweet, musical laugh sounds melodiously in his ears; "How happy she seems! and no wonder; she is born to love and be loved. Who can resist such beauty! such sweetness!"

"Look on this picture, and on this." See the beautiful, brilliant countess when she thinks she is alone and unobserved—mark that dejected air—that drooping attitude, the small white hands clenched as though in pain, or pressed against her heart as if she would still the wildly-beating pulse—look at those wistful eyes, dim and heavy with tears firmly held back, nor permitted to relieve that weary brain by falling in burning floods: ah, where is the brilliant Lady Duneden now?

A change has come over her nature, too; there is a waywardness, a fixedness of resolution very strange to the Nelly O'Brien of former days; that gentle, trembling girl I once knew. She had told me it was in her disposition to be proud and passionate; but here was a cold, sullen determination that sought not help or sympathy; and yet, poor little thing, I could see that she sorely needed both.

And still on the surface all went smoothly, and even smilingly—there were fewer misunderstandings than there had lately been—little was said, and that little seemed to be soon over, and yet I could see that the breach was daily widened, some subtle influence was clearly and unremittingly at work.

One there is who is always serene and light-hearted

—the affectionate cousin, the trusted friend; with gentle smiles and honeyed words, she softly lures her unconscious victims into that dark valley from which she hopes there is no retreat; with placid indifference she watches the anguish, the gloom produced by her vile machinations, with beaming eye and unruffled brow, she gazes on their faint and agonized struggles; calmly and surely—she bides her time.

Lady Duneden is passing some days with Mrs. Vincent, and Percy and I have dropped in to lunch. There had been a great ball the night before, at which Percy was not present; and the ladies were lightly relating the various incidents for his behoof.

"Such a beautiful girl made her *début*," said Lady Duneden, "a Miss Butler. You don't know what you missed, Percy; she was quite the belle of the party.

"Present company excepted," replied Percy, gaily. "As a *preux chevalier*, I am bound to declare my belief in the peerless charms of certain people who shall be nameless. And he glanced fondly and proudly at his lovely *fiancée*.

"Of course *we* looked very nice," said Nelly, laughing; "but then, we are old married women, and don't enter the lists against *débûtantes*."

"Old married women, indeed," exclaimed Florence, with affected indignation, "speak for yourself, Lady Duneden; I assure you, I consider myself extremely juvenile, and mean to do so for many a long day."

"Ah, Florence, and well you may," said Nelly, with warm and genuine admiration in her tones. "The poor little bread-and-butter damsels may hide their diminished heads when you are by."

"Now, come, don't make me vain," replied Mrs.

Vincent, smiling, and showing her beautiful teeth. "If certain people heard all the compliments they received last night, certain other people would be extremely jealous;" and she nodded her head to Nelly and Lascelles. "I can assure you, Percy," she continued in her soft musical voice, industriously peeling a walnut as she spoke; "Nelly created quite a furore, every one was raving about her beauty and her dancing. How exquisitely you dance, dear; people formed quite a cirele to watch you and Sir Ralph in that valse, it was as near perfection as possible; but, of course, he knows your style well by this time, you dance so much together."

"Sir Ralph does dance very well," replied Nelly; "I quite enjoy a valse with him."

There was a moment's silence.

Percy's brow grew black as night, and I knew by the nervous way in which he played with a knife that lay beside him, that he was greatly discomposed

"I wish you did not valse, Nelly," he observed sharply; "it is a horrid exhibition, in my opinion; not fit for any woman of refinement. Florence never valses; why should you?" I hope you will give it up when you are married."

He spoke as if he were angry and annoyed; and by the time he had finished, there was a hot spot on Nelly's fair cheek, and she seemed struggling to subdue an inclination to reply in the same manner.

"I never heard you object to it before," she said, quietly. "And you have frequently been present while I was valsing. Had you requested me not to do it, I should have complied at once."

Ah, why did he not say something kind to soothe the ruffled spirit, and the matter would have ended

then and there? There, Percy, you showed a great want of tact.

"I did not conceive I had the right to interfere with your amusements; but it does annoy me to think that you and that puppy De Courcy should expose yourselves in that manner to the comments of a whole room. Well do I know the remarks that are made on such occasions." And Percy rose hastily from his chair, and strode haughtily to the window.

It is Nelly now who is convulsively playing with her knife, and the hot spot is becoming more and more vivid.

Can nothing be done to avert the gathering storm? I fly to the rescue with the best will in the world, but ah! with how little power.

"Percy!" I exclaimed, indignantly, "I was at this ball, and should have seen had Nelly received any uncommonly marked attention; there was nothing to which the most fastidious person could object. Surely you know Nelly too well for that!"

In my zeal to defend Lady Duneden I had forgotten Mrs. Vincent, but what did I care for annoying her? Not one iota. She did not like me; of that I was well aware; what mattered rather a stronger portion of aversion?

One soft, shadowy glance of gratitude from Nelly's downcast eyes, and then they resumed a cold, hard expression. Alas! that look was often there now.

"My dear Percy! Dearest Nelly! I am so grieved that my idle remark has vexed you," exclaimed Florence, warmly. "Why, Percy, how can you mind such a trifle? Of course I only meant a little nonsensical compliment to dear Lady Duneden's exquisite dancing; and you take it up so seriously, as if

you could for a moment believe that she could excite anything but the most respectful admiration."

"Respectful admiration," growled Percy from the window; "whirling about like a teetotum with that conceited jackanapes. You never valse, Florence; why do you not advise Nelly to follow your example?"

"Why, Percy! Nelly is a mere child compared to me. Our cases are by no means similar. Besides, I do not care for dancing; she is very fond of it, and quite natural at her age. Come, now; sit down again and be rational; only fancy your flying off at a tangent in this way, all because of my poor little innocent remark."

Percy returned to the table, but he did not become rational all at once. He was out of sorts, and the knife handle was still jerked fiercely about.

Nelly remained silent, but there was no indifference in her flashing eye and varying countenance. Most fortunately at that moment some one called to speak on business to Mrs. Vincent; and she sent to beg Percy to join the consultation.

I seized this favourable opportunity.

"My darling Nelly, you behaved like an angel. I was so frightened lest you should say something a little savage."

"I felt very savage, Charley," she replied, smiling through the tears that rose unbidden to her eyes.

"I know you did, dearest; but now you are glad that you said nothing at all fierce. Now, Nelly dear, while we are all alone, I have one favour to beg. Say you will grant it."

"I must know it first, Charley," she replied; "but I will do much for you."

"It is this, dear Nelly, and you will do it for me:

Go to Percy, when no one is by; speak gently to him, darling, for he loves you well, though his temper is quick now and then. And Nelly—dear Nelly—tell him that you will not valse, as he does not like it. Say this in your own winning way, darling; and Percy will take you to his heart, and all will be peace again."

I had seated myself by her on the sofa, and taken her hand in mine. She rose, and turning full towards me, she rested her fingers lightly on my shoulder and gazed steadily into my eyes. For some moments she remained so without uttering a word, and there was a look in her calm face I could not well fathom; then she removed her hand, and covering her eyes with it, she turned away to the window and looked out of it, as Percy had lately done.

I felt a little puzzled. She did not seem angry or offended, and yet her manner was strange. At this instant Percy entered the room.

She waited not a second, but went right up to him.

"Percy, you wish me not to valse; you do not approve of it."

"I do not," he replied, looking rather surprised; "especially with Sir Ralph de Courcy."

"He has nothing to do with the question," she said, in an indifferent tone. "If you do not wish me to valse, I shall cease doing so; but on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you are of the party; unless, of course, there is some good reason for your absence. On this condition I promise you I will not valse; will you grant it?"

"Certainly, Nelly," he replied. "You make a sacrifice to oblige me; the least I can do is to make a corresponding one for you. Charley, there, will witness the compact." He held her little trembling hand firmly clasped in his, and he looked down on her so tenderly—so tenderly.

I felt a sort of moisture rising to my eyes and a thickening of the throat; so pretending a jocularity I did not precisely feel, I exclaimed gaily, "I am a willing witness to the compact, and now I shall make myself scarce while the sealing process is effected;" and thereupon I departed, and left the re-united lovers to themselves.

"Oh! you dear, foolish little darling! How could you be so soft as to knock under at once—giving Percy his own way without one faint struggle for dear liberty."

"I wish to do nothing of which Percy disapproves —why should I? Besides, I told you that he has made a concession too, we are on equal terms."

"And you really imagine he will hold to it! Dear Nelly, how innocent you are." A merry, mocking laugh finished the sentence.

"Percy deceive me! Percy break his word! Florence! how little you know him."

"I know both Percy and men in general rather better than you do, *cara mia;* and they are all much alike, believe me, and think all stratagems are fair in love and war."

"Not Percy—he is not one of those—but time will prove it. Florence, I see you look incredulous."

"Yes, time will prove it, dear; you are right there.

My opal ring against your malachite bracelet, that ere a week has passed, Percy will prove a recreant knight. Will you adventure it?"

"Willingly, Florence, but you must know that you will lose; a week, indeed!"

"It is not long, *cara*; more merit to my prescience if I win the bracelet."

That very evening there is a grand ball at Lady T.'s, where Nelly and I were first introduced to Florence Vincent.

We are all going, and this time Percy is to be of the party.

Again does Florence wear the black velvet robe and the tiara of flashing diamonds; again is she the unrivalled queen of grace and beauty, a thing to gaze at and to adore.

Claim her, all ye her worshippers; claim her, and worship your radiant divinity; but give me that fair young form, that gentle face beside her; one smile from those softly-parted lips were worth a thousand conventional ones from such a being as Florence Vincent.

Nelly is attired in delicate white silk, only relieved by a few snowy camellias in her hair and bosom; their pure flowers and dark shining leaves harmonizing charmingly with the simplicity and grace of her dress and bearing.

A faint flush like the inner petals of a rose is on her lovely cheek, her eyes beam with a happy and innocent consciousness; in all that gay assemblage no more lovely or loveable creature is to be seen than the fair young Countess of Duneden.

I had dined out, and it was rather late before I reached Lady T.'s.

But Percy had not yet come. I was vexed at this, for I thought he should have been more exact; the concession he had made should not have seemed an unwilling one.

Nelly liked dancing, more especially valsing; and I knew it must be rather a trial to her to listen to all those gay airs and watch the circling couples, and yet to refuse all the numerous solicitations she encountered to join them. Percy should have been by her side, love and approbation in his speaking glance; then, indeed, Nelly would have felt more than rewarded for her little sacrifice. But still he did not come, and the evening was now far advanced. I felt uncomfortable and anxious, and I saw that the hot spot was rising on Nelly's cheek and the angry light in her eye.

Then came a light taunting voice. "What has become of the recreant knight, *cara mia?* Alas! I much fear his promises have been traced on the sand. He is too secure of his throne; I warned you that you had been rash."

"He may have been detained," said Nelly, coldly; "I have more confidence in him than you."

"Twelve o'clock," replied Florence, glancing at a little French clock that stood on a console; "and he had no other engagement, for he said so."

"I shall wait until one," said Nelly, calmly. "After that I shall believe you. You see I have brought the malachite bracelet," pointing to her arm as she spoke. "At one o'clock it is yours, if you win it."

* * * * *

Time passes on, and amid the gay music and silvery laughter in that brilliant drawing-room, all outward sounds are lost and unheeded.

We did not hear the rattle of the fire-engines driven furiously through the midnight streets, the rush of many hurrying feet, the wild screams of frantic women and terrified children, the steady measured tramp of the soldiers ordered immediately to the spot where the swiftly-devouring element is raging angrily. We heard nothing of all this. We did not see one stately form towering high above the frightened multitude, quelling disturbance, restoring order and confidence by the calm vigorous directions that proved the master-mind. The flames are abating in fury, appeased by the destruction that marks their fierce dominion, and as yet no life has fallen a sacrifice.

Pale, trembling mothers, roused from their first heavy slumber, are clasping convulsively to their bosoms their bewildered little children; but cold, shivering, naked though they be, they are all there, and kind hands and kind hearts will soon give them shelter and sympathy.

But hark! one wild thrilling scream rises piercingly above all the din and confusion of the hour.

A young mother, scarcely yet restored to the full possession of her faculties, is alternately clasping her husband and her infant in her fond embrace. She starts hurriedly to her feet, looks wildly round, and utters that harrowing cry as she wrings her hands despairingly.

Her aged grandfather, a poor, feeble cripple, has been forgotten, and is now in the burning house. Even as she speaks, a dozen eager deliverers have rushed to his assistance; but alas! those flames have

driven the boldest back—all aid is now impossible—the poor old man must perish fearfully and miserably.

But no—the stately form has drawn nigh to the distracted group, the commanding voice is hushed while he listens to the imminent peril of the helpless cripple, and then he gazes steadily and thoughtfully at the upper window, whose wooden framework is even now licked by the darting flames.

Hush! there is a silence as of the grave over that vast crowd. All eyes are fixed on the spot where a ladder is dimly seen, its dark outline faintly defined by the red and flickering light of the conflagration.

Oh! surely he is mad! to venture where the trained men of the fire-brigade have vainly essayed to enter! Stop him! he is young—the hope and pride of loving hearts—do not let him throw his life away on so hopeless a deed of daring.

He has calmly released himself from the hold of those who would restrain him from the frightful risk.

"I will do nothing rash; but I cannot know that a helpless old man is perishing, and not at least try to save him." And he is gone.

There is a great silence still; many eyes are anxiously turned on that blazing house, the young woman is on her knees praying for the safety of her aged relative and the brave man who will save him if it be possible; many agonizing minutes have gone by. Ah! there is a quick, simultaneous movement through all that gazing multitude, a faint, universal gasp, and then a stillness more profound than ever.

He has appeared at the window, the helpless cripple in his strong arms; flames are around him, above, below; and now a cloud of smoke and dust, caused by some falling timber, hides him for some moments.

Now he is upon the ladder; it trembles and sways beneath his weight; he pauses for an instant, grasps the old man with one powerful arm, and with the other he steadies himself as he slowly and carefully descends.

When but a few yards from the ground the ladder gave a loud crack. "Hold him!" he shouted, "I am falling;" that instant he cautiously dropped the cripple into the friendly arms extended to receive him, and the next moment the ladder broke, and he himself fell heavily to the ground.

He rose slowly and painfully, but said it was nothing, he had merely strained his shoulder a little, nothing to signify.

He still remained there, giving his orders clearly and resolutely; but all danger was over now, the violence of the fire was abated; and amid grateful tears and blessings from the poor family on whose account he had risked his life, and followed by the cheers and admiration of the crowd, who had witnessed his heroic bravery, Percy Lascelles gave the word of command to his men, and marched back with them to their barracks.

"Ten minutes to one! Ah, Nelly! you will be wiser another time. There is Sir Ralph de Courcy coming to you with certainly his fifteenth request. Percy would be improved by a few leaves out of his book of devotion; but no wonder he is so incorrigible when he finds how thoroughly he can do as he likes. You have not brought him into proper training, *cara mia.*"

"At one o'clock I shall believe you, Florence." The voice was very quiet and passionless; but there

was that in its tone that grated mournfully on my ear.

"Lady Duneden! I am perfectly *au désespoir*. What is the meaning of this frightful cruelty? Surely you do not mean to persevere in it the whole night?" The speaker is the handsome and fascinating Sir Ralph de Courcy; and as he bends over the young Countess he exchanges a quick glance of intelligence with Mrs. Vincent.

"Women are capricious beings," said Nelly, in a tone of affected gaiety. "For all you know, Sir Ralph, I may be under the influence of a spell."

She was, though she little recked it.

"No, fair lady," said Sir Ralph, gallantly, "it is not you who are under the dominion of a spell, but all those who come within the magic circle of your witcheries;" and he threw a world of meaning into his fine eyes.

"All witches had to encounter one rebellious spirit who refused to yield to their mystic incantations," said Mrs. Vincent, laughing; "this is strictly *selon les règles* of the black art; so look out, fair enchantress, or you will be no exception to the rule."

At this moment the silvery bell of the little time-piece chimed one o'clock.

A faint shiver passed lightly over Lady Duneden, she gave one calm, searching glance around, and then rising from her seat, she placed her hand in Sir Ralph's extended arm, and said, with a smile of winning sweetness—"The striking of that clock has broken my spell. I think that it is a valse they are beginning now?"

"It is," he replied, with an air of triumph but ill-

concealed, "the *Valse d'Amour*." And as he wound his arm round her slender waist, and clasped her little hand in his, I could see that he gave it a faint pressure, and rested it for a moment against his heart.

"Stay!" said Lady Duneden, stopping suddenly; "I have forgetten something."

She turned to Mrs. Vincent. "There is your bracelet, Florence, fairly won; and certainly more quickly than I could easily have believed. Now, Sir Ralph, I am ready."

For a few painful moments I watched her graceful figure floating lightly round the room; and then, with a heavy sigh, I turned away.

Mrs. Vincent was watching her too, with the smile of a brilliant fiend on her exquisitely cut lips; another moment and that smile has become perfectly demoniac in its expression, while the glorious eyes have a gleam in their depths so radiantly triumphant and yet so fearful in its exultation that I involuntarily followed her gaze to the spot on which it was fixed.

I met the calm, unwavering eyes of Percy Lascelles; his face, pale and stern, looked out from among a group in the doorway.

I was instantly by his side.

"Oh, Percy! what has detained you!"

But before he could reply, Lady Duneden and Sir Ralph de Courcy whirled up to the very spot where he stood; and Nelly threw back her beautiful head, and exclaimed—"What a delicious valse this has been! How I have enjoyed it."

"It has indeed," murmured Sir Ralph; and he cast an admiring look on his lovely companion.

"Why, Percy," she said carelessly, "I had quite

given you up; but I suppose you think better late than never."

"I am rather late," he replied shortly; but he vouchsafed no further explanation.

"Rather," she replied in an indifferent tone; "but probably you prefer acting according to the letter of the law—now I prefer the spirit."

"So it seems," was his only rejoinder; and he almost immediately turned away.

I followed him.

"Percy, what detained you? Something important, I am sure."

"A fire," he replied briefly; "the men were ordered out, and I had to go with them."

"But explain this to Nelly. She is much hurt at your apparent negligence. A word will put it all right."

"Much she cares!" he replied bitterly. "Ah! Charley, what is that love worth that will not prove its confidence even for a single hour?"

Some one joined us at that instant, and I could not continue the subject.

Again I sought Percy.

I heard that he was in the conservatory, and thither I went. He was not alone—his companion was Florence Vincent; her hand was resting on his arm, her eyes raised to his gloomy countenance. The words I caught on my entrance held me motionless—"Forgive her, Percy! she is so young, so beautiful." What! had I been deceived all along? Was Florence really the friend she pretended to be? Evil thoughts of this woman had dwelt in my mind—had they then no foundation? A transient sentiment of remorse crossed my imagination, but oh! it was soon dispelled.

"Florence!" said Percy hoarsely, "I love Nelly—I trusted her. It was by accident that I was prevented from being here as soon as herself. A fire broke out this evening, and the men were hastily ordered out; I was obliged to go with them. When all danger was at an end we returned to barracks, but in rendering assistance during the fire I had strained my shoulder, and the doctor desired me to go to bed at once. This I would not do, for had not I promised her to come here; and in spite of fatigue and pain I dressed as rapidly as possible and came. What was the sight that met my eager eyes? No bright smile—no impatient glance—but the woman I loved and trusted, clasped in the embrace of a fashionable profligate, the promise she had given me cast to the winds. Ah! Florence, this spectacle cost me a severe pang! Would she have done this had she truly loved me?" And Percy covered his face with his hand, that manly face now so sad and hopeless.

"She is young, Percy—young and thoughtless; let this plead in her behalf. Her vanity was wounded, it seemed as though you were neglecting her, and wounded vanity is hard to bear; it is a great trial to a pretty little thing like Nelly. Then, Sir Ralph de Courcy is so fascinating; it is his boast that no woman can resist him; and Nelly has always had a penchant for his attentions."

"Then she must choose between him and me," said Percy fiercely; "for that man shall claim no acquaintance with my wife!"

"Oh! that you can settle among yourselves," replied Mrs. Vincent. "But come now, Percy, and be amiable; poor little Nelly has done nothing so very wicked after all; she dearly loves valsing, and has

merely taken a little quiet revenge on you. She has succeeded in piquing you, and making you quite sufficiently uncomfortable; so now it must all come round again, and you shall make a fresh compact. Come with me and make a few pretty speeches. That is Sir Ralph's especial forte; try if you cannot outdo him."

"You must excuse me, Florence," said Percy coldly; "I am in no humour for making pretty speeches, nor shall I attempt to rival Sir Ralph in that line or any other. I shall now return home; my arm pains me a good deal, and may require some attention."

He was indeed deadly pale, and had the appearance of one who had undergone great fatigue.

"You do not look well," said Florence, with a soft glance; "I shall explain all to Nelly, and make your excuses. Good night."

I followed him out into the calm moonlight, and strove to make him understand how matters really stood; but he would not listen to me, and merely smiled at my eager remonstrances.

"You are a warm friend, and a bitter enemy, Charley," he said in a kind tone; "I know you do not like Florence, and for this I am chiefly to blame. But she is Nelly's friend more than you imagine. And now leave me, my dear boy, I wish to get home at once, and we can discuss this more fully to-morrow."

It was no use saying more to him at present; and slowly and sorrowfully I returned to Lady T——'s. I gained the house in time to catch a short conversation between Lady Duneden and Mrs. Vincent. "Where is Percy?" said Nelly carelessly; "I heard you were with him in the conservatory."

"I was for a few minutes," replied Florence. "He

was rather out of sorts, as you may guess; and declared for an immediate retreat. I endeavoured to dissuade him from going, and promised him all proper penitence on your part, *cara;* but he was quite inexorable, and went off in high dudgeon."

"I am sorry you troubled yourself to do anything of the kind," said Nelly coldly. "Did he make no excuse for being so late?"

"He said something about a fire; but really I did not pay much attention. He was only a minute or two with me."

"A fire!" replied Nelly, in rather a more interested tone; "then perhaps he may not have been able to join us sooner; perhaps he had to go in charge of the men."

"Ah! I see you are relenting already," said Florence, laughing; "no wonder Percy proves a recreant knight when so secure of his pardon."

"You mistake me," replied Nelly, in a haughty tone; "I merely meant that he may have been unavoidably detained, in which case I should regret having misjudged him."

"As if he could not have asked one of his brother officers to replace him," observed Florence; "I am sure any of them would have gone at a word; you know, *cara*,

> 'When a lady's in the case,
> Of course all other things give place.'

Now this admirable axiom is by no means properly impressed upon Percy's mind; he is not half gallant enough."

Lady Duneden made no rejoinder, but walked away with a moody expression on her bright face; and very soon afterwards she begged me to order her

carriage, as she felt fatigued, and wished to return home.

Next day all Dublin was ringing with the account of the fire; and the public journals vied with each other in sounding the praises of the gallant Captain Lascelles, who, at the risk of his own life, entered the burning house, and bore off in safety the helpless cripple whom all else had abandoned and given over as lost.

Percy himself was invisible, for the pain in his shoulder had greatly increased; the doctor reported a severe strain, with a considerable inclination to fever, and ordered him to remain quietly in his room for a few days.

Long before this time had elapsed, I had been summoned to the weeping and repentant Nelly, who was bitterly mourning her impetuous conduct; and who implored me to explain everything to Percy, and bring her back the assurance of his entire forgiveness.

I strove to instil caution into her artless nature. I strove to warn her against that dangerous friend to whose deeply-laid schemes I traced much of her present unhappiness. But I found it was very difficult to make any decided accusation against this wily siren, who planned all her machinations so artfully, that I was able only to advance my own suspicions of her treachery.

"Poor Florence, it is not her fault, believe me," said Nelly, while warmly defending her absent friend; "I know you have some strange antipathy to her, but indeed she is not what you fancy her. She has been so long accustomed to the freedom of a widow that all control appears to her irksome, and she would fain see me as independent as herself."

I took a little billet to Percy in his sick-room, a billet written through many blinding tears.

He read it slowly through, folded it carefully and placed it beside him, and then he sighed very heavily.

"Dear Nelly," he said; "poor little Nelly—she is very sorry now—but ah! Charley, she might have trusted me."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FRESH MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

AGAIN all is apparently smooth and smiling, and the bark floats gaily on the summer wave.

But many light shadowy clouds are lingering on the far horizon, and alas! they are gathering, gathering. It was a great grief to Nelly that she was not musical, Percy loved it so passionately.

He would sit and listen to Mrs. Vincent for an entire afternoon or evening; placing song after song before her as long as she would afford him the gratification, and she was not chary on those occasions.

But "the Name" and "the Beloved One" never again crossed her lips.

I remember one particular evening as though it were yesterday. We had been dining with Lady Duneden; Mrs. Vincent, Percy Lascelles, and I.

In the evening, Florence as usual went to the piano, and sang song after song according to our various requests; occasionally stopping for a little conversation, and then singing again.

Percy sat near her, his head resting on his hand, thoroughly given up to the enjoyment of that wonderful melody that rung in sweet and powerful cadence through the silent room.

The tea had been placed as it usually was, in the back drawing-room; and Nelly rose softly and busied herself in preparing it. I had accompanied her to the tea-table, and was leaning back on the sofa beside her, conversing in an under-tone, and watching her light and graceful movements.

Mrs. Vincent did not take tea, and when Nelly had poured out her own and mine she prepared a cup for Percy, and, declining my offered aid, she took it herself to him at the piano.

He must have been too much absorbed in the music to note her entrance, and she stood beside him with the cup in her hand perfectly unheeded; while Percy gazed admiringly at the beautiful siren whose thrilling strains held him spell-bound; his dark eyes gleaming with a softened light as her song roused sweet memories that for the moment had no thought but of lingering enchantment.

Through the open door I saw Nelly watch him cautiously for a few minutes, and a saddened expression came into her eyes as she stood there so entirely forgotten; then she laid the cup of tea on a small table near him, and returned to the room where she had left me.

She did not resume her post at the table, but advanced to the fire-place, and murmuring something about feeling cold, she knelt down, and held her hands before the bright blaze.

Her face was averted from me, but I saw more than one tear fall heavily, and I knew that gentle heart was very sorrowful.

Stealthily she raised her hand, and brushed away the evidences of her grief—ah! Percy, thine was the hand that should have chased away those gathering

drops—thine the lips that should have whispered soothing and loving words which would have brought the smile of a glad tenderness to that sad young face, and the glancing light of happiness to those downcast eyes.

I saw that on this occasion she wished for no sympathy, and sought to conceal her distress; so I respected her feelings, and entered on some long tirade that called for no particular reply or attention on her part. She had soon recovered her tranquillity, and no one but myself was ever aware of this little incident; but I sometimes remembered it with sorrow and great disquietude.

It happened one evening that some of the 21st Hussars had been dining at our mess, among them Sir Ralph de Courcy. Later in the night, when cigars and brandy and water were the order of the hour, the conversation fell into a strain utterly repugnant to the feelings of most men of refinement; I saw the curl of disgust on Percy's haughty lip; he made several efforts to direct their remarks into less objectionable channels; and but for the courtesy due to an invited guest who formed one of the party, he would have taken his immediate departure.

Percy had many faults, but coarseness either of behaviour or conversation was not one of them; his ideas and deportment were on all occasions those of a true and refined gentleman.

Any one might have seen that the present conversation was extremely distasteful to him, and Sir Ralph de Courcy was not slow in making this discovery; but its only effect appeared to be that he resolutely set himself to work to annoy Percy as much as lay in his power, by making a number of very

uncomplimentary remarks on the female sex generally, and widows in particular.

He was, however, so perfectly guarded in what he said, that without making oneself totally ridiculous it was impossible to take open offence at any of his observations; which were delivered in that easy, smiling manner indicative of much remaining behind, only to be implied by the arching of the eyebrows or a faintly contemptuous shrug.

When the party broke up I accompanied Percy to his room for a few minutes.

"Insolent scoundrel!" he growled out from between his strongly clenched teeth. "And this is the man whom women like, and encourage to dangle about them; a treacherous, black-hearted villain, not an idea of principle or honour in his composition. Faugh! what a hateful conversation—it sickens one to think of it. If that man ever puts his rascally foot in dwelling of mine—I am not what I take myself to be, that's all."

The following afternoon we were to take our usual ride; and Percy and I proceeded to lunch at Mrs. Vincent's, where Lady Duneden was again on a visit.

The servant who opened the door had a note in his hand; he laid it on the hall-table while assisting us to remove our great coats, and the superscription, in Lady Duneden's writing, was clearly visible—

Sir Ralph de Courcy, Bart.,
*21st Hussars.*

Percy could not avoid seeing it, for he placed his hat on the table beside it, and a gloomy expression instantly overspread his countenance. Both ladies were in the drawing-room, Nelly seated on a low chair by the fire,

her little white hands, sparkling with rings, held close to the bars; her face considerably flushed, but not altogether, I imagined, from the heat of the fire. I could always tell when Nelly was a little out of sorts, and I at once concluded that Mrs. Vincent and she had lately had some interesting discussion; though in the calm bearing and conventional smile of that lady nothing whatever could be traced. Nelly looked so bright and pretty; she made such a charming picture as she sat there, a dress of violet merino buttoned close to the throat, finished with a small collar of rich point-lace, cuffs of the same fastening the plain tight sleeve, that showed so distinctly the shape of the beautifully rounded arms and exquisite little hands. From a narrow black ribbon round her fair throat depended the small enamel and diamond horse-shoe that had been one of my early gifts. She wore it always; but alas! in her case it proved but a valueless amulet. She was such a winning, gentle creature, and required to be dealt with very gently and tenderly. Ah, Percy! in the full strength of your glorious manhood, had you sufficient compassion for the weakness of this childlike nature; did you love her all the better for her little faults of petulance and wilfulness, and remember that she was but the clinging ivy and you the protecting stem that should have upheld that frail and graceful plant, which maintains its being but through the support of others?

"We are making up a party for the theatre to-night," said Mrs. Vincent, when the first greetings were over; "the T——s and ourselves. I hope you can both join us?"

"I am at your service," replied Percy; "but stop! —Nelly, I have just seen a note going from you to

Sir Ralph de Courcy—may I inquire if that is an invitation to him also, because in that case I must beg that it may be recalled; otherwise I regret that I cannot join the party. I dislike that man excessively; and you are not ignorant of this."

"I certainly am not," replied Nelly, rather decidedly; "you take no pains to conceal your aversion to Sir Ralph. I have felt quite ashamed of your rudeness to him on several occasions; and I assure you it has not been lost upon him either."

"And has he dared?"—said Percy, haughtily, then checking himself, he added in a mild but firm tone. "Once for all, Nelly, let me tell you honestly, that I dislike this man, and would forbid his companionship to anyone in whom I felt an interest. Will you oblige me by recalling the note you have just written to him, otherwise I cannot accompany you this evening."

"As it happens," replied Nelly, coldly, "that note contains not the slightest allusion to our party at the theatre, it concerns something entirely different; but since you have such an unaccountable antipathy to poor Sir Ralph, I had better warn you in time that he is of our riding-party this afternoon."

"Intolerable!" said Percy angrily; "I hate the man, and find him in my way at every corner. Florence!" he continued reproachfully, "could not you have remonstrated against this arrangement, knowing how much I should dislike it?"

"Really, Percy, I have no right," she replied, in a pleading tone; "and Sir Ralph is such a favourite with Nelly that you must try and overcome your little prejudice. I can see no great harm in him, poor man; he is remarkably agreeable, I think."

"I have no intention of doing anything of the kind," said Percy in a determined voice; "he is a man of whose principles I have the lowest possible opinion; he is no fit companion for any right-minded woman, and he shall never enter a house that calls me master."

"Then I suppose it is of no use delivering his message to you?" said Nelly with affected, but very ill-affected, indifference; "I suppose you would scorn to accept any invitation of his?"

"I should most certainly decline it," replied Percy decidedly; "but how comes it that you are the bearer of any such commission? What have you to do with it?" And he looked at her very steadily and earnestly.

"Sir Ralph gives a party to-morrow night," said Nelly, calmly; "Florence and I are going to it, and we are requested to invite Charley and you."

A dead silence followed those few simple words.

Mrs. Vincent coloured and looked uncomfortable; Nelly employed herself in arranging her bracelets, but I have no hesitation in saying that her heart beat fast and wildly, and she never once lifted her eyes.

I heard Percy's quick, unequal breathing, but still he spoke not; and none among us ventured to break that ominous stillness, which yet fell on our hearts as though it were lead.

Then came a hoarse discordant voice: could it be Percy that spoke?

"Nelly," he said, advancing a step towards her, and fixing his dark, melancholy eyes on her downcast face; "only from your own lips should I have believed what I have now heard, and I am more grieved by it than I can tell you; but you cannot mean that you

will go to this party—go in the full conviction that it is against my express wish ?"

He paused and awaited a reply, his eyes rivetted on her countenance.

" I have every intention of going," she replied, composedly; " but I conclude that we need not hope for the pleasure of your company."

" You will go, Nelly ?" and Percy's brow grew very dark.

" Yes, I will," replied Nelly, tapping her little foot impatiently on the fender. " Really Percy, you are making a most absurd fuss about nothing at all; pray do put off that melodramatic expression—it is exceedingly unbecoming, I do assure you."

" Come now," said Mrs. Vincent, gaily; " I have no exact business to interfere, and no doubt lovers' quarrels are very charming in their way; still, as a friend of both parties, I cannot bear to see you making yourselves unhappy about such a trifle. We won't inquire too closely into Percy's motives for this terrible prohibition; let it be sufficient that *' le roi le veut,'* and we poor women must obey. I am afraid, Nelly dear, that you and I are rather spoilt for masters."

" Say for tyrants, Florence, and you will be right."

Percy started as though he had been stung. " Tyrants ! Nelly. This from you !"

" Why do you act like one if you do not like the name ?" she inquired.

" Now, really Mr. Nugent," said Mrs Vincent, turning to me, " did you ever see two such spoilt children ? Dear Nelly, do give him his own way; it is of no use resisting any longer. You must write a pretty little note and rescind your promise to Sir Ralph; and Percy will forgive all that has passed."

"Forgive!" exclaimed Nelly, wilfully; "I require no forgiveness; and I have not the slightest intention of breaking my promise to Sir Ralph. You may do as you like—and Percy too. And now do let us end this wearisome discussion. I am tired to death of it."

"It is ended, Nelly," said Percy gravely; "it is ended."

"Oh! very well, I am uncommonly glad to hear it; and now I hope you mean to be rational and get over your dislike to Sir Ralph."

"I do not, Nelly," he replied; "and regret that I am prevented from joining you in your ride to-day."

"Oh! pray do as you please," she answered coldly, but with a flashing eye; "I dare say we shall contrive to do without you."

"Sir Ralph de Courcy," said the servant in a loud voice, throwing wide open the drawing-room door. A stiff bow passed between him and Percy; and the latter rose to take his departure.

"Oh! you are going," said Nelly, calmly. "It is a pity you can't stay. Shall we see you to-night?"

"I fear not," he replied in a low compressed voice, looking at her very earnestly.

"You fear not," she repeated with a light laugh; "just as the spirit moves you, I suppose? Sir Ralph, I hope you will give a more gallant reply."

"What is it?" he inquired eagerly. "I am entirely at your service."

"Only to accompany us to the theatre this evening."

"With the greatest possible pleasure," he replied. "Had I ten thousand engagements I should break them all with such a prospect as that! We can then discuss all our arrangements for to-morrow night. I consider you two ladies the queens of the entertain-

ment. By the bye, I hope Captain Lascelles and Mr. Nugent will do me the honour of being present ?"

"I regret it will not be in my power," said Percy with stiff politeness.

"No !" said Sir Ralph, with a slight sneer; "I know parties in general have but small attractions for you; but one might be inclined to consider some magnets totally irresistible. Mr. Nugent, I trust, is less obdurate."

"I shall be very happy," I replied; for I wished much to be near Nelly if she finally adhered to her resolution of going.

While Florence was making some observation to Sir Ralph, I saw Percy stoop and whisper to Nelly. She looked annoyed, but rose from her seat; and saying, "Excuse me for a minute, Florence; I shall be back again directly," she accompanied Percy from the room.

The colour disappeared from the beautiful face of Mrs. Vincent, her fingers played nervously with her watch-chain, and it was but a very forced attention that she gave to the conversation of the gallant baronet.

Soon Lady Duneden returned, her eyes glittering with suppressed excitement, her cheeks flushed to the deepest crimson. Her interview with Percy had too clearly been none of the most amicable; and I could hear a faint sigh of relief from the now composed Florence Vincent.

I gave Nelly my arm down to lunch.

"Dear Nelly," I whispered, "you are playing with edgetools; do not try Percy too far, he will not stand it."

"But he must stand it," she replied. "Why not he as well as I? He is playing lord and master a little too soon; he has actually *dared* me to go to Sir Ralph's to-morrow night!"

"Oh! Nelly, do not go," I urged.

"You, too, Charley! I thought I had a friend in you."

"And so you have, Nelly, a firm and true one. Would I were your only counsellor; you and Percy would have fewer misunderstandings."

"Ah! Charley, I know you are true," she whispered softly; "I have great faith in you."

This was all we had time to say; but I resolved to do all in my power to bring about a reconciliation between those proud but loving hearts, and to use every influence to persuade Nelly to abandon an engagement so very repugnant to the feelings of her betrothed husband. I cannot say that the ride was a very pleasant one.

Lady Duneden was evidently in wretched spirits, and her attempt at gaiety was so forced as to be visible to us all.

My endeavour to get her some little distance behind the others was perceived and frustrated by Mrs. Vincent, who skilfully contrived to keep the whole party far too closely together to render any private conversation at all practicable, and I was reluctantly obliged to abandon the attempt. It was equally impossible in the evening, when Sir Ralph de Courcy was again in close attendance; and I parted from Nelly at the door of the theatre with feelings very far the reverse of comfortable. I therefore arrived at the determination of speaking very seriously to Percy

Lascelles, and informing him of my suspicions that Nelly was insidiously instigated to act in a manner so thoroughly foreign to her usually gentle nature.

It was no very pleasant task, let me tell you; but for the sake of those so dear to me I resolved it should be done, and done without any further loss of time.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PERSUASION.

PERCY LASCELLES was absent from barracks when I returned thither from my afternoon ride, so I had no previous opportunity of speaking to him.

I now sought him in his own room, guessing full well how I should find him occupied at that hour; for Percy seldom retired to rest until the night was pretty far advanced.

He was sitting in his peculiar lounging chair, smoking certainly, but in a moody, restless manner that betokened great mental disquietude; the soothing influence of his favourite weed was for once entirely thrown away on Percy Lascelles.

He looked round as I entered.

"Ah! Charley, is it you? Come in, my dear fellow; I am at the old trade you see. You know where to find the needful; help yourself."

I did so, and lighting a cigar I pulled a chair forward and seated myself beside him at the fire.

"Percy, we have not had one of the old talks for a long time."

"We have not, my boy; more's the pity."

"It has not been my fault, Percy; I have missed them very much."

"And so have I, Charley; it is the truth I speak there. Ah! my boy, I begin to wish they never had stopped, that nothing had ever happened to come in the way of our old evening confabulations. They were very pleasant, Charley, and they left no sting behind."

We were silent for a minute or two, and smoked very diligently; and then I looked at Percy and said gravely, "You know I am your friend, Percy? You know I wish you well?"

"Yes, Charley; I believe it from the bottom of my heart."

"Then you will not be offended if I tell you something that is on my mind. Do listen to me, Percy;" for he had thrown himself back impatiently on his chair, and a slight frown had gathered on his forehead.

"Say on then, let me hear what it is."

"It is this, Percy. You must see as well as I do that Nelly is much changed of late."

"I both see and feel it," he replied, impetuously; "is this what you came to tell me?"

"It is not all," I replied. "Has it never struck you that there must be some cause for this, some reason why such an alteration has taken place in a nature once all gentleness and devotion?"

"The caprice of her sex, Charley," he exclaimed impatiently, "no other reason is necessary. We have been deceived in her, Charley, both you and I; she is very lovely, very loveable—oh! how loveable!" he murmured in a low tone; "and we have been blinded to faults that are now assuming a prominent position. If I thought she really loved me I would forgive every-

thing, but I do not think she does; lately she has given me but few proofs of it," and he laughed bitterly.

"She does love you, Percy," I replied; "of that I am firmly convinced; but you speak of *her* faults, of her capriciousness—may she not also have something to complain of—some trials to bear too?"

I looked at him inquiringly.

"Ah! Percy, do you think you have been quite faultless in your conduct to her?"

"I love her very truly," he replied, "and would not willingly give her a moment's pain—poor little Nelly!" he murmured tenderly; "she is not fitted to bear much."

"And yet you have caused her to shed many sorrowful tears, Percy."

"I have done so!" he exclaimed; "you are mistaken, Charley. She may have chosen to be annoyed that I would not yield to her in matters where it was my duty to refuse compliance, but surely you do not blame me for this?"

"No," I replied, "for that I do not blame you; but, Percy, you spoke of our blindness a short time ago, blindness to poor Nelly's faults—does it not strike you that there may have been great blindness indeed; but in another direction?"

"What do you mean?" he asked in a tone of surprise.

"You have both—Nelly as well as you—accused me of an unjustifiable prejudice against Mrs. Vincent. I own her beauty, her wonderful fascination, her many delightful qualities—but I have seen, has it never struck you?—that since Nelly and she became the friends they now are, all those unfortunate misunder-

standings have arisen between you and her; it was never so before, Percy."

He mused for a few minutes.

"And what do you infer from that, Charley?"

"I have heard it said that a woman can never forgive one who has wounded her pride, that she will treasure up the injury in the deepest recesses of her heart, and no one can even suspect the existence of such a feeling. You once deeply offended Mrs. Vincent; do you not think that such a memory may now be hers?"

A mocking laugh burst from Percy.

"My dear Charley, what a romantic little enthusiast you are; you are dreaming of the dark ages, when people revenged themselves with the dagger or the bowl. Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond must be flitting before your mind's eye."

"No, Percy, I am not; I am in very serious earnest. This is no laughing matter."

"I know, my dear boy, that your intentions are the very best; but indeed you must get this unfounded idea out of your head. Florence Vincent and I are the most cordial of friends; if you reflect for an instant you must allow this; and still more, she is the warm friend of Nelly, and has more than once endeavoured to smooth away our little differences; nay, she has pleaded to me on her behalf, and stood up for her as none but a friend—and a sincere one—would have done."

"Percy, think me as bigoted as you will, I cannot believe that she is Nelly's true friend. Once I chanced to overhear her apparently offering an excuse for some trifle that had gone wrong between you, and there was no sincerity in her expressions of regret. The words

were carefully chosen, Percy; they sounded friendly, but their meaning was very far from soothing, and well did she know that."

"Nay, this is absurd, Charley," said Percy, with much vehemence; "you dislike Mrs. Vincent, and you see all her actions through a distorted glass. Knowing her as I do, I cannot listen to such accusations against her."

"You are displeased, Percy," I replied sadly, "but it does not alter my opinion, only arrived at upon mature reflection. Do not think me impertinently curious," I added, "but have you ever told Nelly anything of your early life?"

"Only as much as might concern her," he replied. "I have never mentioned that part of it relating to my cousin Florence; I thought it wiser not."

"It might have been better if you had," I observed.

"I can't see that; women don't like those things, they have an uncomfortable feeling about them; and under the circumstances of her happening to meet Florence, I felt very thankful I had not done so."

"I am not sure, Percy," I replied; "Nelly might have been more on her guard; she trusts Mrs. Vincent so thoroughly; and deny it as you may, I am convinced that an evil influence is exercised—has long been exercised on Nelly; she is not what she once was."

"There is no denying that fact, Charley; the very point from which we first started. She is changed."

"It is but in outward seeming," I replied. "She is the same loving, warm-hearted being as ever; but she has been instigated to act as though she were indifferent and capricious. You may believe me, Percy, I speak from perfect certainty. Listen to me, and oh! Percy, be guided by my advice. You parted in anger

on both sides, and as things at present stand, Nelly will go to Sir Ralph de Courcy's; she will not be permitted to retract her promise, whatever may be her own feelings or wishes. Go to her, Percy; see her alone; speak to her as you once did, not coldly or angrily, but with the voice of love and gentle persuasion, and she will yield, I know—I am sure of it."

He took several turns up and down the room. I watched him with eager interest.

Then he came behind my chair, and placing his two hands on my shoulders, he exclaimed,

"You are a true friend, Charley, a true and a faithful—and I will do as you wish."

And then we parted for the night.

## CHAPTER XX.

### WON AND LOST.

NEXT morning after parade I saw Percy deliver a letter to his servant, and in reply to my questioning glance he replied,—

"It is a note to Nelly, asking to see her alone. Very few words, Charley, but written as tenderly as even you could have wished."

That note Nelly never received.

I heard it all afterwards, and I shall tell it here.

Mrs. Vincent's maid chanced to be coming out of the house as Percy's messenger arrived. She took the note from him, desired him to remain while she went for an answer, and proceeded up-stairs in search of Lady Duneden.

On the way thither she encountered her mistress, and mentioned to her that a messenger from Captain Lascelles was waiting below.

"Give me the note," said Florence; "I will take it to Lady Duneden; she is in her own room."

With trembling hands she seized the important missive; but, lightly sealed, it broke asunder in her grasp, and Florence yielded to the overpowering temptation, and made herself mistress of its contents.

As she read the few simple words that breathed only of love and tenderness, she crushed the paper in her fiercely clenched hand, and threw it from her as it had been a viper. Slowly she picked it up again, and endeavoured to smooth its wrinkled folds; and as she did so a bitter light came into her eye, and her cheek turned deadly pale from the guilty thoughts that had entered into her treacherous heart.

After a moment's reflection she proceeded to rejoin her servant.

"Give Lady Duneden's compliments, and she will be happy to see Captain Lascelles at half-past two o'clock."

Again she was alone, and clasping her hands wildly together, she muttered in hoarse accents,

"One bold stroke, and I may yet be avenged! For this have I waited long, but it has come at last!"

Percy's messenger returned, aud brought the answer. He seemed disappointed that she had not written, and I thought she might have sent him a few lines.

Slowly and wearily passed the afternoon. Percy departed to his interview, and I felt unable to settle to anything while the result was in suspense; so I remained chiefly in my own room, employing myself in arranging some papers that had long ago attained a most perplexing state of confusion.

I heard a rapid foot upon the stair, a step outside my door, and Percy dashed it open, indignation written on every quivering feature, a terrible anger in his kindling eyes.

"Percy!" I exclaimed, "what, in Heaven's name, is the matter?"

"I was right," he replied fiercely; "and she is even worse, more thoroughly cold-hearted than I took her

to be. Heartless woman!" he reiterated, "I despise her! I have done with her for ever! Oh, Charley, how I have been deceived in her!"

"What has happened, Percy? Tell me."

"I went, as she requested me, at half-past two, and found Sir Ralph de Courcy's dogcart standing at the door, his impudent varlet of a groom talking to Mrs. Vincent's man. Much annoyed, I was about to turn away, when I reflected that Sir Ralph might be visiting Florence, and that Nelly might have seized this opportunity of seeing me alone. I went up to the door and asked for her; the servant replied that the ladies had desired him to deny them to every one, as they were particularly engaged. With difficulty restraining my indignation, I inquired if there were not some mistake, as Lady Duneden expected me at this hour, and I came by her desire. The man looked rather confused, and replied, 'Well, I think not, sir, but I shall go and see.' In a few minutes he returned, and, Charley—can you conceive that she had the audacity to send me this message—"

His brow grew livid as he spoke, and he dashed back his hair with a gesture peculiar to him when highly excited.

"What, Percy?"

"Lady Duneden's compliments, and she was sorry that she could not see me just now, being particularly engaged; but she hoped we should meet this evening at Sir Ralph de Courcy's. Charley, do you think I will submit to this? Never! From this moment she is free."

Silently and sorrowfully I listened to him, stunned by what I had just heard.

Ah! Nelly, you were indeed changed when you could act in such a manner as this.

"Why don't you stand up for her now?" said Percy, bitterly. "Have you no excuse for this?"

"I am grieved," I replied. "Deeply, deeply grieved."

"She is not worthy of it, Charley—she is not worthy of one sad thought from you. We will forget her, Charley, you and I; she has come between our old friendship, but she has not destroyed it—it will revive again, stronger, firmer than ever."

He laid his hand lightly on my shoulder, and looked kindly into my sorrowful face.

"I have always been your friend, Percy, always shall; but I cannot forget her. For she has not been all to blame."

"Charley," he said with stern composure, "for your sake she shall have one trial more. I will write to her again. I will tell her plainly, that if, in defiance of my express wish and request, she persists in going to that man's house this evening, all is at an end between us. If even now she complies with my desire, I will forgive all that is past, and forget it as though it had never been. More I will not do."

He drew a writing-table towards him, and hastily penned a few lines.

Once more a messenger was despatched, but he was desired not to wait for an answer, that Nelly might have time given her to reflect; and Percy extorted from me a reluctant promise that I would in no way attempt to interfere.

Slowly the hours passed on, but there was no reply from Nelly, and my mind began to misgive me sadly.

It was now nine o'clock.

I was debating whether to dress for Sir Ralph de Courcy's or not, when Percy, with a grave, pale face, entered my room.

"But a short season of doubt now remains," he observed: "my servant tells me that Mrs. Vincent's carriage is ordered for ten o'clock. With my own eyes I will witness the failure of all my hopes—the blighting of every fair prospect. It may be that Florence is going alone; but alas! I fear it is not so. At any rate I shall be there to see."

"You are going to Sir Ralph's?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"No, to M—— Street. I shall there see whether Nelly accompanies Florence or not."

"I shall soon be ready, Percy," I said; "wait a few minutes, and I will go too."

We were in the street where Florence lived, one of the most fashionable in Dublin. Carriages were dashing rapidly through it, but as yet Mrs. Vincent's had not appeared; however, in a few minutes we heard its heavy roll proceeding from the adjoining mews, and soon it had taken up its position in front of the hall-door.

Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour elapsed, and then the door was opened, and the brilliantly-lighted hall was distinctly visible. But little conversation had passed between Percy and myself as we paced slowly up and down the vacant pavement; our hearts were too full for speech; and at this moment I may truly say I could almost hear the beating of mine.

Two white-robed figures passed out and entered the carriage! There was no mistaking the haughty port and stately step of Florence Vincent; and alas! alas!

the lamp-light fell brightly on the graceful figure and delicate features of Nelly O'Brien!

"I am satisfied," said a calm voice beside me; "good night, Charley, I am going home."

"Oh! Percy!" I exclaimed, "have pity on her. Make no rash resolves."

"Good night, my dear boy, you have done your best. I also have borne a good deal: but there are bounds beyond which human forbearance cannot go. Good night." And he turned rapidly away, and left me standing there alone.

With a sad heart I walked slowly in the direction of Sir Ralph de Courcy's.

Though living ostensibly at the cavalry barracks, Sir Ralph had engaged very handsome apartments in a well-frequented square; and he had more than once given parties there, respecting some of which entertainments very odd stories were told.

On this occasion many of the first people in Dublin had honoured him with their presence, and the arrangements were of a proportionably *recherché* nature. It was a scene of mirth and gaiety, and yet there were many aching hearts in that bright assemblage who would have given much to lay their heads on their solitary pillow, and indulge without restraint in the tears that pressed so hotly on their throbbing brain. Well did I know one.

It was very long before I could exchange more than a simple greeting with Nelly. Sir Ralph was her constant and assiduous attendant, and Mrs. Vincent was always hovering near.

But "where there's a will there's a way," and at last I had the opportunity for which I had so long waited.

"Ah! Nelly, I did not think to have seen you here. You have made more than one sore heart by coming."

"Have I?" she replied carelessly. "I am sorry to hear it." Then turning towards me she said in a low rapid whisper, "Charley, as you value my regard, attempt no excuse for him! His conduct has been tyrannical!—insulting!—unbearable!—and I have not borne it! Do not name him again."

Sir Ralph at this moment claimed her for a valse; and as I glanced round on quitting the apartment he was bending over her and she smiling serenely in his face, the fairest, brightest creature among all the lovely forms that graced that festive scene.

It was late, but I wandered long in the calm moon-light; and the city clocks were striking four when I entered the barrack-square and sought my own quarters.

A note lay on my table. It was from Percy.

"DEAR CHARLEY,—On quitting you I encountered Frank Durham, and he has persuaded me to accompany him on a few days' cruise in his yacht. I want a change and leisure to reflect, which I can scarcely have within reach of your kind pleading. The *Mermaid* is off Wexford, and we are taking the night train to that place, so as to sail with the morning tide. Adieu, my dear boy. Heaven bless you for all you have been to me.—Your sincere friend,

"PERCY LASCELLES."

He was gone.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE STORM.

It is the afternoon of the day on which the *Mermaid* was to arrive in Dublin Bay, and many hearts are anxious for the fate of the gallant little yacht that had so often merrily breasted the foaming waves of the Irish Channel. The wind had blown hard during the night, by the morning it had increased to a hurricane; huge waves with snowy crests were dashing wildly on the shore, and the howling of the gale sounded loud and mournfully as each fresh gust drove the dark storm clouds in lowering masses across the threatening-looking sky.

All hoped that the little yacht had made for some friendly haven, where it was safely sheltered from the fury of the gale; but late in the afternoon it was reported, and alas! with only too much truth, that the *Mermaid* was descried in the offing, bravely struggling with and exposed to the whole violence of the storm!

Hastily I repaired to the harbour at Kingstown, which was the usual anchorage of the yacht; and there I found the shore thronged with many anxious observers, all gazing mournfully in the direction of the

little vessel, which was one moment lifted high on a crested wave, and the next sunk so low in the swelling waters as completely to hide her from our sight.

I accosted a sailor who had been watching her attentively.

"Is there no doubt of its being the *Mermaid*?" I inquired. "May it not be some other yacht?"

"It's the little *Mermaid* sure enough," he replied; "I knows her by the cut on her, but she may weather it yet, though her chance is but small." And he shook his head despondingly as he looked at the boiling surge, and shrunk before a gust of wind that nearly took us off our feet.

A light touch rested on my arm; I turned hastily round, and Nelly O'Brien stood beside me, her frail form shrinking before the angry blast.

"Nelly!" I exclaimed, "you here!"

"I have been here some time," she replied softly. "Walton is with me," pointing to her maid, who stood at a short distance. "Oh, Charley! do you think I could remain quietly at home and know that he was exposed to such a storm as this? I knew he was to return to-day, but oh, Charley! when I look on that raging sea, my heart dies within me."

"Nelly, darling!" I replied, soothingly, "you must not stay here. Let me take you to the hotel, and I will bring you the very earliest intelligence. It will kill you to remain exposed to weather like this, besides the harrowing uncertainty you must undergo."

"Let me remain," she murmured, in a choked voice; "I can stand everything—everything but losing him. Oh God! if this should be! And we parted in anger!"

The *Mermaid* was still gallantly maintaining its way, but the gale was every instant increasing in fury, and even the most ignorant could not avoid perceiving that unless some immediate change took place, the doom of the little yacht and its unfortunate crew was inevitably fixed. No boat could live in such a sea; the bravest among those brave sailors knew that the attempt would be perfect madness, certain death to themselves, without a chance of assisting the helpless crew.

Nearer came the yacht—and nearer; and now we could plainly see how it rose and fell in that fierce sea, how each dashing wave rushed over it, and the eddying gust bent it almost to the water's edge, from which it slowly and feebly recovered itself.

Nelly clung to me with frantic gestures.

"Oh, Charley, Charley, can nothing be done? Must we see him perish before our eyes?"

I shook my head in mute despair. It was very terrible to watch that struggling vessel, to think whom it contained, and know oneself to be utterly powerless.

"A boat, Charley!" she urged, in her wild anguish. "Oh, cannot a boat be sent to their assistance?"

"It would be instant destruction," I replied. "No boat could live in that surf—oh! merciful Heaven! she's gone—no—oh no!"

"She's righted again," shouted many voices.

The yacht had yielded to the force of an overwhelming wave, and for a moment we thought it had disappeared for ever; but another minute beheld it bravely battling yet, and a cheer of satisfaction burst from the beholders.

It was now so near that we could faintly distin-

guish the figures of its crew, who had apparently lost all command of their little vessel and had lashed themselves to the masts and sides to save themselves from being swept overboard by the waves which every moment rushed over the yacht from stem to stern.

Every effort was made by those on shore to render them assistance. Rockets with lines attached to them were fired in the direction of the yacht, but the immense force of the wind drove them all wide of the mark, and the attempt to communicate with them in this manner was at length reluctantly abandoned.

Nelly had sunk upon her knees on the wet ground, her head buried in her hands as though she could not gaze upon the fearful scene.

Once she lifted her stony countenance, beautiful even in all its despair and ghastly whiteness.

"Sailors!" she pleaded in hollow accents, "will none of you try to save them? I am rich, and gold untold shall be theirs who will venture to their aid. Can you see them perish in your very sight?" and she feebly wrung her hands as she urged her vain petition.

"Poor young thing!" muttered a weather-beaten sailor, "she'll have a brother or sweetheart aboard the yacht. God have mercy on him, for she'll never see him more!"

"Is there no hope? Can nothing be done?" she screamed, starting wildly to her feet. "Charley, is there no hope?"

I could not answer her, and turned away my head.

"'Tis a hard trial, Miss," said the old sailor, feelingly, "and ye are but young to bear it. Poor thing! poor thing!"

"Will you not try to save them?" she gasped, looking wildly in his face.

"'Tis not in human power," he replied solemnly. "There are brave men here who would dare all that can be dared to save those poor drowning creatures; but to launch a boat in a sea like this would be a tempting of Providence."

There had been a momentary lull in the rage of the tempest, that deceptive lull that usually precedes a renewed and fiercer transport of fury; and at this moment, with a low wailing noise, came a hurricane so violent that few were able to resist it. The old sailor and I supported the half-fainting Nelly, when at this instant a low murmur burst from the spectators, and hastily gazing at the foaming sea, I perceived the yacht caught in the full fury of the resistless gale.

The gallant little *Mermaid!* Again and again she struggled against the overpowering force of the storm, now sunk in the trough of the sea, now raised high on a mountainous wave; then came a yet fiercer—yet more terrible gust; a wave of tremendous size struck her on the side—she toppled heavily over—over all the uproar of the elements came that wild, despairing cry of drowning men. I pressed my hand over my eyes to shut out the agonizing spectacle—groans of horror and sobs of compassion sounded on every side—the dirge of the ill-fated *Mermaid* and her hapless crew.

Alas! alas! where now is the gallant little vessel?

One hurried glance I gave to the spot where the yacht *had* been. "Nevermore! nevermore!—oh! Percy, Percy!"

"Look to the young lady," said the old sailor, gently touching me. "Break it to her kindly, poor thing. Bid her pray for their souls." He rubbed the

sleeve of his rough jacket across his eyes and retired to a little distance, still furtively watching her.

She feebly raised her wearied eyelids, saw me gazing on her with sorrowing compassion; with one shrill, piercing scream, she darted from my hold, pressed her hands wildly to her temples, and with burning glance she swept the objectless sea—then turning round she read in the pitiful faces beside her what had occurred.

For one moment she stood thus—no one who then saw her will ever forget those rigid features—those glassy eyes;—then an expression of unutterable anguish passed over her countenance—and pressing her hand quickly to her heart, she staggered a few steps, and fell heavily into my arms.

She had broken a blood-vessel.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TOO LATE.

TENDERLY we bore her from the fatal spot; with agonized solicitude we hung over that trembling life, and watched each breath that came from those pallid lips.

It was not given us to hope.

From the very first the physicians told us that nothing but a miracle could save her; their mournful fiat had gone forth, and we knew that her days were numbered. That delicate organization could not bear up against the shock it had received; and those who loved her best could not look in that face of silent woe and hopelessness, and breathe a wish that she might recover.

After her first wild burst of sorrow she had been very calm. Silently she lay all those long, weary hours, her eyes either closed or fixed on some apparently distant object, her hands listlessly extended on the bed; but sometimes a shudder would convulse her feeble frame, and clasping her hands over her throbbing temples, she would utter a low cry so full of broken-hearted anguish and desolation that those who heard it would bow their heads and strive to shut

out that terrible wail of agony, of agony that had rent a young heart in twain.

Ah! me, it was a sad, sad time. I wrote immediately to kind Miss Carew, and implored her to come at once; I could not bear that only Florence Vincent should hang over the gentle victim who lay there sacrificed to her treacherous machinations; and as speedily as the journey could be made the warm-hearted but sorrowful old lady was by the dying pillow of the young cousin she had loved so well.

One sad event had been so crowded upon another, that those few days seemed to me more like a fearful dream than a melancholy and waking reality. Percy —Nelly—both taken from me! What would the world be without them! Scarcely, even now, could I realize the fatal truth that Percy Lascelles, the man I had loved so truly, the friend to whom I owed so much—my guide—my companion—was gone for ever from my longing sight—gone for ever from the hearts that had so honoured and cherished him.

Never more should my eye meet that glance, so true and noble—never again should I clasp that manly hand, never hear the genial, heart-stirring tones of that glorious voice! Oh, Percy! Percy!

Two days after the sad occurrence Lady Duneden expressed a wish to speak to me alone.

It was little good refusing her anything now; agitation of mind might produce even a more fatal result than any trifling exertion on her part; and, merely desiring me to be cautious, and endeavour to appear as calm as possible, the physician at once acceded to her request.

She lay in a large bed with heavy crimson curtains, and I did not at first see how deathly pale was that

lovely countenance, and how clearly the ghastly signet of death was stamped on that fair young brow.

Many pillows were heaped on each other to support her in a half-sitting position, and a richly coloured Indian shawl was thrown around her shoulders, its gorgeous hues painfully contrasting with the wan features and bloodless lips.

Her luxuriant golden hair was confined in a white silk net, but here and there a stray curl had escaped and wandered loosely over her throat and neck; and while we talked a bright sunbeam found its way into the darkened chamber, and rested lovingly on the rippling tresses, sadly recalling my first interview with her who now lay on her dying bed—the first time I had seen the sunshine fall brightly on those glossy braids, now damp and uncurled with the fast-gathering dews of death. For a few minutes we did not speak; I only held her nerveless hand in mine, and strove hard to still the violent throbbing of my pulses.

It was she who first broke the silence; and oh, how low and weak was that once musical voice; those joyous, ringing tones were now soft and hushed as the first thrilling murmur of an Æolian harp.

"Dear Charley," she whispered, "there is something on my mind that I wish to tell you; and I must not delay it, for I may not have many hours left now."

I could not speak, I only pressed her hand.

"I am dying now, Charley, and I would not speak evil of any one. But Florence, Charley—I fear that Florence has not been quite true to me or to—to Percy. It matters little now, Charley, and surely her punishment is too heavy for her not to meet with forgiveness; but it has been a sore, sore pang to me that our last words—his and mine—were those of anger and bitter-

ness. Ah, Charley, I let the sun go down on my wrath, and bitter indeed has been my repentance, but it was too late! It was not all her fault—I was hasty and passionate; but, Charley, it is true that she urged me to act as I did; she taunted me with Percy's indifference—she misrepresented him in many ways; she advised me to pique him into greater attention by encouraging Sir Ralph de Courcy. I believed her—I thought she was my friend, but I was deceived, Charley; she was my enemy, and ah, she has proved a deadly one! By accident I discovered that Percy had called on the afternoon of Sir Ralph's party—by my desire, he said; I knew nothing of this, nor did I learn it till next day. I could not understand this, and I spoke to Florence; she seemed confused, and allowed that she had desired we should not be disturbed during Sir Ralph's visit; and that Percy had unfortunately called, and had been refused admittance. I could then guess how angry he would naturally be, and I spoke warmly to Florence, and said I was annoyed by what she had done, and that when Percy returned I should explain it.

"We had a dreadful scene, Charley; she told me that he did not care for me or he would never have acted as he did; that I was weak and pitiful-minded to put up with it; and then, Charley, she told me what I had often suspected, that he had loved her many years ago; and, oh! so differently from me; and that—oh, Charley!—she said this—that his heart was hers still!

"At first I was stunned by what I heard, and then I reflected that Percy, noble and good as he was, would never so deceive me; it could not be all true that she said. Then my eyes were opened, and I saw through all her false seeming; and the thought came into my

mind that she had tried to separate me and Percy. Oh, Charley, it was so dreadful to think that it might be so—that he might have cast me off for ever!

"I resolved to confess all to him—to own my faults and follies—to plead for forgiveness—even if he could not give me love. And I think he would have heard me, for he loved me once, Charley—he loved me once."

"He loved you to the last, my darling," I replied; "be sure of that. She was nothing to him; he loved you only."

"Oh! Charley—and I can never see him more; never tell him of all my sorrow and repentance—never tell him how dearly I loved him!"

She bent her head over her trembling hands, and low, choking sobs shook her slight frame.

"Dear Nelly," I said, endeavouring to steady my own voice, "I must not remain if you agitate yourself thus."

"What does it matter?" she replied mournfully. "Ah! Charley, what is life to me now? but while I have still a little strength left, let me now thank you, my dear, dear brother—my more than brother, for all you have been to me. That I have but ill-repaid your ceaseless devotion you will not remember now; in this the last hour of my life I feel that I have one heart that is entirely my own; and, dear Charley, it may be a cheering thought to you in after-days that your loving care and untiring affection have shed peace and comfort on my dying pillow."

I had sunk on my knees beside her, and burying my head in the clothes I tried to stifle my suffocating grief. Speak I could not.

She passed her feeble hand softly over my hair;

"Dear, dear Charley," she whispered, "I am grieved to cause you this sorrow. Ah me! would I had been more worthy of all this love. I know you will not forget me, Charley; I know you will not. Think of me kindly, my dear young brother, forget all my pride and wilfulness, think of me as I was when first you knew me. Remember me no more as the Countess of Duneden—think of me only as the Nelly O'Brien of our early friendship."

"Oh! Nelly, my own dear Nelly! I cannot, cannot part with you!"

"Dear Charley," she said gently, "for me the bitterness of death is past; I have little left to suffer now; my heart is broken! You will not forget me, but in time you will feel my loss less bitterly. Ah! Charley, you who love me, do not wish me to live. For those who mourn and are weary there is rest only in the grave!"

She was silent for a short time, and I did not interrupt her.

"One thing more," she said at last. "Florence—I would rather not see her again; her presence would recal very much that I wish not to think of now. Tell her from me, Charley, that she has my entire forgiveness. Poor Florence; her thoughts must be very sad; she could not have foreseen the awful consequences of her conduct, and it may comfort her to think that I forgave her."

Her voice had perceptibly weakened during the latter part of our interview; more than once I had moistened her lips with some strengthening beverage that stood at hand, and bathed her clammy forehead with eau-de-Cologne.

She now remained long in silent meditation, her

hand clasped in mine, her eyes often resting sadly and tenderly on my face as I still knelt beside her pillow. All sounds were hushed in that house of death; I heard only Nelly's measured breathing, and the faint ticking of a small clock that stood on the chimney-piece. Suddenly it seemed to me that a carriage drove rapidly up to the gate and stopped there. Steps were hurriedly thrown down, a quick, heavy tread sounded on the gravel. I heard low, murmuring voices; a deep groan, as of one suddenly horror-stricken; a despairing exclamation that thrilled me to my heart's inmost core, and made me start wildly to my feet; and once more there was a silence as of the grave. I trembled violently, and felt as if I could hardly breathe.

Nelly had started up from her recumbent attitude, her hands were outstretched with frenzied gesticulation, a glare as of madness was in her widely-distended eyes, her pallid lips were parted and the gasping breath came thick and convulsively.

"Charley! Charley! that voice, I heard it—speak, speak! He is there, my own, my beloved. I shall see him once more. Oh! quick, quick!"

There were steps on the landing-place outside the bedroom door, and low voices were holding consultation. One glance at Nelly's countenance, and I rushed towards the door, threw it open, and beheld leaning against the balustrade with ghastly brow and travel-stained attire—horror in every look and gesture —Percy Lascelles!

"Come," I exclaimed, "come instantly, or it will be too late!"

He darted past me, threw himself on his knees beside her, wound his arms round her trembling form,

and held her long and wildly to his heart, murmuring faint words of remorse and tenderness, kissing her frantically on cheek and brow; seeing not, knowing not that the grey shade of death was even now stealing over those lovely features, and its dull glaze dimming the lustre of those brilliant eyes so soon to close in the dark night of the tomb.

"Percy, my own Percy," she gasped, in faint, expiring accents, "you forgive me—you love me still?"

"Forgive you, my darling Nelly! Oh! shall I ever forgive myself! Nelly! Nelly! Oh! live and bless me—Nelly! my darling Nelly!"

A smile of ineffable, serenity stole over her gentle countenance; one long, lingering gaze she fixed on him whose love was her latest consolation, then turning to Miss Carew, who stood weeping silently, she extended her hand and softly bade her adieu.

Then placing it in mine, she drew me towards her, and murmured softly, "Dear Charley, I die very happy—I have you both. Farewell, my own dear brother;" and sinking into the beloved arms that held her so gently and tenderly, she laid her head, like a weary child, on Percy's shoulder—two or three faint sighs—one last upward glance at that beloved face—a long deep-drawn respiration—and that gentle, affectionate heart was at rest for ever!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### LA VENDETTA.

I PASS over the first days of aching sorrow. There are some griefs on which no pen should dwell, and the fate of Nelly O'Brien was one of these.

That she was mourned as few even as young and lovely as herself have been mourned, none who have read this short record of her brief career will doubt.

Sorrowing tears fell on the sweet, pale face, so calm and peaceful in its last wakeless slumber; sorrowing hearts followed that fair girl to her early grave, and strong men bowed their heads in overpowering anguish when dull and heavy on their ear came the sound of the earth and stones rattling on the deeply-lowered coffin. It was all over—one bright form had vanished from the earth—one glad young voice would never again linger in our ears—an aching void was in our hearts not soon to be filled up—but still the world rolled on merrily—gay laughter and careless jests—all went on as before—and the heavy rains and pitiless snows of that long dreary winter fell fast on the grassy mound that covered the mortal remains of the fair young Nelly O'Brien!

How Percy Lascelles had escaped the fate which we never once doubted, I must now shortly explain.

He had not returned in the yacht; his friend and he having altered their plans, and proceeded to their destination by land.

Chancing to take up a newspaper, he there learnt the catastrophe that had befallen the unfortunate *Mermaid;* and deep emotions of thankfulness crossed his mind when he reflected on the fearful death from which he had been so mercifully preserved.

Immediately he also remembered the sorrow which his supposed fate would cause to many; and he decided on instantly returning to Dublin to relieve our apprehensions, and rejoice us with the certainty of his wonderful escape.

He went straight to the barracks, heard there of Lady Duneden's hopeless state, and that I was at that very time with her. Not a moment did he lose in seeking further confirmation of the sad intelligence; but proceeding, in a state of mind impossible to describe, to the house where Nelly lay, at the point of death, he arrived there in the manner I have already mentioned. For many days after the sad event, he remained entirely in his own room, seeing no one, not even me.

Of the part which Florence Vincent had taken in the mournful calamity, he was yet in ignorance; even when once more admitted to his presence, I did not dare to add to sufferings like his by informing him of the cruel guile that had so treacherously urged on the fatal consummation of so much love and so much misery. But this fresh aggravation of his grief was not long spared him.

He one day received a note from Mrs. Vincent, merely a few words, in which she mentioned that she was on the eve of quitting the scene of so many painful

memories, but ere she finally departed, it was her earnest wish once more to see him, and bid him adieu. She hoped I would also accompany him, and she named a day and hour for the farewell interview.

How I dreaded this meeting need not be told; I even endeavoured to dissuade Percy from agreeing to it; but when I found he was inflexible on this point, I determined to be present also.

Florence wore deep mourning, and not one vestige of colour was to be traced in cheek or lips; she was perfectly ghastly, and deeply-marked circles surrounded her hollow eyes; she had clearly suffered much. She entered from another room almost immediately after our arrival; but, beyond a silent bend, she offered us no greeting; and she neither sat down herself, nor desired us to be seated. Laying her hand on the back of a chair that stood near her, she cast a glance of withering scorn on Percy and myself, and drawing herself up to her full, stately height, she said, in a voice clear and passionless—

"Percy Lascelles! I have sent for you that we may look on each other for the last time, and speak the last words we shall ever utter to each other.

"From henceforth our paths in life are different, for I have that to tell you this day which will make you curse the hour you first met me. Did you think, Percy, that I was a woman to forget? If so, you little knew me! Long ago—many years ago, Percy Lascelles, I knelt at your feet. I implored you, as never before was man implored by woman, to take from me your cruel scorn, to forgive me that I had injured you, to say one kind word that should comfort me in my bitter misery and self-reproach! What was your answer? Tell me!"

She threw back her magnificent head in grand disdain, and calmly awaited a reply.

"Florence," said Percy, sadly, "to what purpose do you recal all this? It is long since past and forgotten!"

"Past it may be," she replied, bitterly, "but not forgotten—never forgotten! Many long years have passed since then, but that moment of agony and humiliation is ever fresh in my recollection; even now, when I think of it, my brain burns and throbs as it did when I knelt before you and you refused my despairing supplication. Think you, Percy Lascelles, that this can ever be forgotten?"

"Florence! spare me—and yourself."

"Spare you!" she exclaimed with a wild, mocking laugh; "no, Percy, I will not spare you—I have not done so. I said I should have revenge, and I have had it. From the hour that I quitted your presence after that scene of vain humiliation, I was a fiend—not a woman. None knew or suspected the fire that raged in my heart; for years it has smouldered there, waiting for a fitting opportunity to desolate where I was resolved there should be desolation. It came at last—you tremble and grow pale—yes, Percy, I have been well revenged! I found you prosperous, happy, rejoicing in the new love that had sprung up in your heart—how I leave you is not for me to tell you.

"I persuaded her—I persuaded you that I was your friend, your *friend*, Percy! your affectionate cousin—nothing more. After that my course was easy. I sowed distrust, I excited suspicion. I shrank from nothing that should help me to compass my end—and I have triumphed! I swore that she should never be your wife——"

"Woman!" exclaimed Percy, hoarsely, "name her not. Lips like yours are unfit to name that angel of purity and gentleness. Oh! my God! what fearful blindness has been mine. And now it is too late! I have lost her for ever."

He leant against a marble cabinet, and buried his face in his quivering hands.

"And now it is too late!" she repeated with bitter emphasis. "One pang alone has crossed my heart. It was for her. I did not anticipate—what has happened," she continued in a gentler voice, "it has cost me many wretched thoughts. She is gone now. She can never more cross my path, and I will do her full justice. It was no easy task to mould her to my designs; she loved you, Percy, and for a long time she trusted you too; her heart was all yours."

"Florence! Florence! do not kill me!" gasped Percy. "You say you are revenged; oh, in mercy be satisfied! torture me not in this frightful manner."

She smiled a fiendish smile.

"I have little more to say. She had to contend with a stronger mind, a fiercer nature than her own; with one who was *resolved* she should yield, and at last she did yield. You know the rest. One last desperate stake I risked; if I succeeded, my revenge was accomplished; if I failed, then should I have departed from Ireland for ever, as I am about to do now."

She turned to me as I stood a silent spectator of this scene of guilt and passion. "I wished for your presence, too, Mr. Nugent, that you might hear my confession; that from my own lips you might know my provocation and my revenge. I have no ill-feeling towards you, though you have never been my friend; there may be that about me that is repellant to a

nature true and guileless as yours; and, though every semblance of goodness has long since forsaken my seared heart, I can yet see and respect it in others open and honourable as yourself. To you I must ever be a painful memory; but I shall think of you sometimes, and not unkindly. Fare you well; and may future happiness console you for all the sorrow I have caused you."

She bent her proud head in parting salutation, glanced for an instant at the spot where Percy stood, his face still concealed by his hands, and slowly and haughtily she quitted the apartment, leaving Percy and me alone.

I never saw her again.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE CRIMEA.

NEARLY a year has passed since the events recorded in the last few chapters.

Great quarrels have convulsed Europe, and the red banner of war has been unfurled by more than one powerful nation. Regiment after regiment has been despatched by England to take part in the glorious struggle, and the day came when the 144th received its route for the battle-ground of the Crimea; and a loud cheer rent the air when its brave soldiers heard the mandate that sent them forth to win honour in the noble fight for a country's liberties.

How that gallant corps added many fresh laurels to those it already possessed is known to all—commanders, officers, men, all seemed inspired with one common ardour, and many a deed of daring called down thunders of applause and merited the warm encomiums bestowed on them alike by friend and foe.

We landed in time to join in the desperate passage of the Alma; and as I pressed onwards beneath that murderous fire that rattled like hailstones on the

water, I saw many a gallant fellow fall around me, and heard the deep groans of agony that told of fearful and mortal wounds.

The 144th lost several brave soldiers, and one poor young ensign, Mr. Graham, was wounded while crossing that fatal river, the grave of many a noble and manly heart. He pressed his hand on his breast when he felt that he was struck, and staggering blindly forwards, he would have fallen into the stream, but Percy Lascelles, who was close to him at the time, seized him in his powerful arms and carried him across to the opposite side. Here he had assistance rendered him as soon as possible, but all in vain; the bullet had lodged in a vital part, and soon death mercifully released him from his sufferings. He was the first gap in our hitherto unbroken band of comrades; and as we gathered together in the evening of that day of carnage, we spoke in low and mournful tones of the gay young boy who had so soon finished his career of gallant promise.

Ah, war! thou art a fearful thing, a fearful and a terrible.

It is not amid the roar of cannon, the clamour of trumpets, the hoarse cries and swelling cheer of battle, that thou art seen even in thy most dreadful phase; for then the fever and excitement of action blinds the eye and closes the ear to much that is both mournful and revolting; there is little time for reflection or regret, little opportunity for the mind to dwell on aught but the desperate onslaught and fierce conflict of the moment.

But then comes the reaction! The missing of the kind familiar face, an anxious inquiry eliciting the sad information that the man whose voice is even yet

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ringing in your ears as he cheered his company into action is now lying stiff and cold on the field where the deadly bullet struck him down and silenced that voice for ever!

The fair-haired boy who but that morning buckled on his sword so proudly, and whose blue eye beamed with exultation at the thought of the coming fight; alas! that eye is dim and sightless now; those sunny curls all dabbled with gore from that gaping wound; as you turn away your sickening gaze you only feel thankful that his death was mercifully instantaneous.

The bloody turf covered with mutilated corpses, the ghastly horrible sights that meet your eye in every direction, the agonized groans of the wounded and dying, the heavy, heavy weight as of lead that presses upon your own heart, these, these are the dread trials that every soldier must encounter, and from which there is no escape. It is true, that after a time the heart becomes partially steeled to sights of horror and woe; the mind in a great degree recovers its tone, and learns to regard what was at first so exquisitely painful as but an unavoidable concomitant of a sad but salutary system; but there are few who become so callous as to witness unconcernedly the scenes of distress and torture that are everywhere forced upon the sight at the close of a fierce and sanguinary engagement; that man's heart must be hard indeed if he can preserve a dry eye and unmoved exterior when slowly and carefully tracing a way among the horrible sights and noises of a battle-field.

Steadily and surely the campaign proceeded.

Sickness was in our camp, and many a poor fellow who had borne the brunt of hot actions succumbed beneath the still more deadly attacks of fever and pes-

tilence; but, on the whole, the 144th were fortunate, and suffered much less than did many other regiments.

Poor Captain Marsh was the only officer whom we lost in this manner; and long and truly was he mourned by his sorrowing comrades.

A kind of low fever seized him, which he vainly endeavoured to throw off; and, after some weeks of alternate amendment and relapse, he fell a victim to its insidious ravages.

Poor fellow! he heard his sentence without a murmur, and took an affecting farewell of us all, only wishing us a better fate.

"It is rather hard," he said, in a slight tone of repining, "to die here like a sick dog. If only a Russian bullet or lance-cut had knocked me over, I should not have minded it so much; I have been in the way of plenty of them; but there's no help for it now, it's the fate of war."

We buried him in a sheltered spot, and raised a small mound over his remains, at the head of which we placed a rough stone cross with his name and regiment rudely carved upon it; and there we left him.

I have said but little of Percy Lascelles, once more my chosen friend and inseparable companion. From the day that the coffin-lid closed over the mortal remains of Nelly O'Brien, he had returned to his former habits of solitude and indifference to the world. Kinder, gentler than of yore in his manner to all with whom he was brought into contact, there was yet that in his calm, impassive face that repelled all idea of sympathy and intimacy; and with the exception of myself he avoided all fellowship with his brother-officers, and spent very much of his time alone. By the men of his regiment he was perfectly idolized;

they would follow him cheerfully into the thickest of the fight; a word, a glance of approval from Captain Lascelles was more valued than the highest praises from any other officer, nay, than even from the Colonel himself. When the bullets were whistling around him and shells tearing up the ground by his side, when the crackling of musketry and the roar of cannon mingling with fierce cries and imprecations all conspired to form a scene that might have appalled the stoutest heart, then was Percy Lascelles cool and collected as on the most ordinary occasion, issuing and acting upon orders with a decision and promptitude that were the admiration of every one, and inspired the soldiers immediately about him with an ardour that led them to shrink at nothing. Wherever the fire was hottest and the enemy thickest his Highland bonnet might be seen waving on high; the men told the most fabulous stories of his courage and prowess, and vied with each other in sounding the praises of their darling captain, who also seemed to lead a charmed life, for as yet he had remained perfectly unharmed by sabre or bullet.

But well did I know that brave as he undoubtedly was, it was not entirely the burning ardour of a soldier that urged him to the commission of deeds from which men, even of tried courage, might well have shrunk; to him his life was valueless, and no risk of whatever magnitude had power to deter him from actions that many would have called rash in their daring gallantry.

Was there ever a peculiarly dangerous service to be performed, he was ready to volunteer;—the silent night attack, the desperate sortie, the not less hazardous service of the trenches, each and all found him ready. His kindly voice was heard by many a dying couch, his hand administered many a soothing draught

and performed many a friendly office for those who soon should need them no more; dim eyes lighted up at his approach, and weary hearts woke to fresh life at the sound of his welcome footstep. Ah, Percy! Percy! we had not many like you. And so the time rolled on, and brought us to the last scene of the glorious drama.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SEBASTOPOL.

It was the night before the attack, which we all knew was decided to take place on the morrow. On that morrow, how many a heart now bounding and hopeful should be hushed for ever! how many had gazed for the last time on the setting sun! when the shades of night should once more fall darkly on our tented camp, alas! how many a mournful blank might there not be in our friendly circle!

I am not ashamed to own that I felt anxious and oppressed. I had faced death often before without the same feeling of disquietude that overshadowed me now. It may be that I knew we were on the eve of no ordinary struggle; it may be that that mysterious sensation of approaching evil had fallen dimly on my heart, and a heavy weight of foreboding, that yet had no form or substance, had taken possession of my faculties.

It was nearly midnight.

I sat solitary in my tent, in which a lamp was faintly burning; and my thoughts had wandered back to many scenes and places which, it might be, that I should never again revisit.

A measured step fell softly on my ear, the curtain

that closed my tent was lifted, and Percy Lascelles entered, and fastened it again behind him.

"I did not expect to find you asleep, Charley," he observed; "not very many in the camp will know what it is to have a good night's rest, though some of them will sleep sound enough this time to-morrow."

"I fear so," I replied, gravely. "It will be a bloody business."

"It will, Charley. Many a fine fellow will be quiet enough before the place is in our possession; you and I may be among the number, my boy."

"We may, indeed, Percy; I was just thinking that, when you came in. I don't know how it is, but I feel particularly dull to-night; I can't shake off a kind of nameless dread. If I were superstitious, which I am not, I should almost be inclined to think something was about to happen. But you and I have been very lucky hitherto; neither of us has ever been touched, and we have been pretty well in the thick of it, you especially."

"'Every bullet has its billet,'" he replied, with a melancholy smile; "and it may be, that to-morrow night will tell a different tale for one or both of us. But, Charley, I too feel strangely to-night; something within me seems like a mysterious warning. I have never felt so before, and it may be that to-morrow's sun shall never set for me; but for leaving you, my dear boy, I should not know a thought that was not perfect thankfulness. I have not escaped hitherto because I shunned death! Two or three little matters I have often meant to tell you; I shall take this opportunity—God only knows whether we shall ever so meet again. I did once mention that the poor little girl, Edith Vincent, died several months ago, and

in consequence of this, Deerhurst has again come into my possession. None can in any way legally claim it; it is in my power to dispose of it as I will, and on my death, Charley, it is left to you. You need not object to it, my dear boy; no mortal creature is injured by my bequest. I shall never marry—even if my life is spared. As soon as it again became mine, I gave directions that this should be as I wished. You will be wealthy, Charley; but riches could not be in better hands. It is a noble property; may it bring you more happiness than it did to me. This paper I will give into your keeping. Out of such great wealth you can well spare a small portion, and there are several good fellows in the regiment to whom a few stray thousands will be very acceptable—Barry Willis, and one or two more whose names are in this paper. Mrs. Grant, too, Charley—I have not forgotten her; and, if you return to England, and see her, tell her that I ever gratefully recollected her unwearying kindness and goodness to one so little worthy of it."

"My dear Percy," I exclaimed, "I cannot bear to hear you talk in this way, as if your death were an almost certain thing; do not give way to such gloomy forebodings. You should be the very last man to entertain such dismal ideas; for one would almost be inclined to say you bear a charmed life, so many hair-breadth escapes have fallen to your portion."

"True, Charley, true," he replied, still with the same calm, serious voice. "But I am not speaking as I do without good reason."

He paused for a few seconds and buried his face in his hands, while I watched him silently and with some wonder, for I saw that from some cause or other he

was unusually moved. Then he spoke again, gravely and solemnly—

"I am not superstitious, Charley; I have never been one to believe in omens or warnings; nay, I think I should have derided the idea of any one attaching much importance to such unreal and improbable manifestations. But Charley, last night, only last night, as I lay awake in my tent, I saw as clearly as I see you now, the form of my dead brother, pale and motionless as when I looked on him for the last time so many years ago. He stood at the foot of my bed, and I saw him so plainly that I know it was no dream or strong effort of the imagination; it was himself."

"Percy, you must have been thinking of him; it must have been an excited imagination. I do not, cannot believe that such things are."

He shook his head. "No, Charley, I did not imagine it; I know that I am not deceiving myself. I am not nervous or weak-minded; I had no fear even while I knew that I was looking on a spirit; I only felt that he was my brother, whom I had loved so well; and then I remembered that I had heard of such warnings before; how, where two who were much attached had been separated, the spirit of the one taken away had appeared to the survivor shortly before his own death; and then I felt that it might be so with me."

"But, Percy, you heard nothing?"

"Nothing. He never spoke, and I saw him but for a few moments; but it was enough. This is why I speak to you as I have done to-night; we may never do so again, Charley; it may have been for the last time. If so, remember all I have said to you."

"Percy," I replied, forcing back the moisture that was fast gathering in my eyes, "we may both fall in this coming battle, and it is well to contemplate such a possibility. I have written a few letters that I should wish sent home in case such a fate is mine; and if you are here, Percy, you will write to my father and break it to him, poor old man, for I know he and all of them will be very sorry. And, Percy, if—if I only live of us two, I will do all you wish. And now do not let us say any more about this, for it makes me sad. If this be our fate, we cannot avert it; but I wish to feel brave and hopeful to-morrow, and if I dwell too long on such mournful subjects, I shall be downhearted instead."

Long into the night we talked; it seemed as though we were both loth to part. But at last Percy rose and said, kindly—

"I will leave you now, Charley; it will refresh us both to lie down for an hour or two. Good-night, and God bless you, my boy!"

The last hours of Sebastopol are at hand.

I will attempt no description of what is already so well-known to all; for Alma, Inkermann, Balaclava, Sebastopol, are now as household words.

It was a sad and a fearful day, and ere it had passed entirely and for ever, alas! how many a one had bitter cause to rue it! Poor little Gordon, a great and universal favourite, fell early in the day. He had nobly distinguished himself on several previous occasions; and the gallant lad was cheering on the men and advancing boldly under a tremendously hot fire, when a fragment of a shell carried away his right leg, and he fell fainting to the ground.

I was very near him at the time, and I desired a soldier to help me to lay him against a little rising ground a few paces distant, where he was rather less exposed to the fire. Before a surgeon could reach him he was gone, exhausted by the frightful bleeding of his terrible wound.

"It's all up with me, Charley," he said, in a faint voice—"I feel that; but I've done my best for the old 144th, and I shall die with my harness on, as a soldier should. I wish I had got into Sebastopol; but I shall never do that now. Poor William! I wish I could see him just to say good-bye; but you will do it for me, and tell him to give my love to all at home. Poor mother! it will be sad news for her—she was very fond of me. Charley, give me your hand—I'm going now—Charley——"

His head fell heavily on my shoulder, and I laid him gently on the ground; he was beyond all aid now, and with a sad glance at his pale young face, I flew to rejoin my company.

Poor Harry Gordon! we should miss his honest face and cheery voice; and it was with a heavy heart that I looked my last on him as he lay in the cold sleep of death. He had a peculiarly boyish appearance, and had long been an established pet and favourite in the corps. "Little Harry Gordon," or "Little Geordie," were his usual names; poor fellow! he would never answer to them again. I felt sad for the elder brother now left alone, and who had not even the melancholy satisfaction of closing those loving eyes and hearing the last words that should ever fall from those pale lips. He was scarcely twenty, poor little fellow!—very early to be called away; but he has left a bright memory behind him. I often think of Harry

Gordon; and the comrades who liked him so well still speak of the dead boy with sincere regret and affection.

On raged the furious battle; the air was thick and heavy with the dense smoke from the cannonading; while in wild and fierce confusion came the mingled rattle of musketry, the dull reverberation of the guns, the loud sharp orders of commanders, the ringing trumpet-calls, taken up and repeated on every side.

I felt wild with excitement; all thought of danger was as completely forgotten as if none existed.

We reached the foot of the walls. Ah! then, indeed, came the desperate and fearful struggle—a death-struggle it proved to many.

Through fallen earth and *débris* of every kind we forced our way—we had gained the breach, when Macpherson, who carried the colours, was struck down; a sergeant beside him seized them, and raised them on high; next moment he staggered and rolled over, a lifeless corpse. I dashed forward and released them from his stiffening grasp—a rush of indescribable emotions overpowered me—I struggled fiercely forward—planted my foot on the fallen carriage of a gun—waved the now bloody ensignabove my head, and shouted loudly, "This way, 144th! Hurrah!"

The men cheered vociferously in return, and made fierce efforts to gain the position where I stood; again I waved the colours above my head, and at the moment I heard the whiz of a bullet, and felt a strange, stinging sensation in my right arm, which instantly fell nerveless by my side.

I knew that it was broken; but my blood was up,

and next moment my left hand had again raised the drooping ensign, while once more I shouted eagerly, "Forward, 144th! This way!"

We are within the ramparts, and oh, how dreadful was the scene on every side, where hundreds of corpses, both of friends and foes, lay heaped upon one another in ghastly confusion, and the ear was pierced by the frightful groans that burst from those whom death had not yet released from their sufferings.

At every moment I saw the towering form of Percy Lascelles, and heard his deep-toned voice loud above all the uproar of that awful hour. Once or twice I was near enough to receive a kind glance of encouragement from him, but there was no time for words; action alone claimed our undivided attention.

It was the moment of victory. Colonel Grant pressed forward at the head of his men, by his own example encouraging them to still more arduous exertions; when at this moment a ball struck him on the shoulder. He staggered and fell on a heap of dead; and a cry of triumph burst from the enemy, who knew from his appearance and bearing that he was an officer of rank. Several of them rushed on him as he lay helpless, and instant death had been his fate but for the intervention of Percy, who saw his danger and darted to his assistance. Two gigantic fellows fell dead beneath his powerful stroke; a third struggled desperately, but was almost overcome, when a fallen comrade who had lain unnoticed beside them raised himself on his elbow, and with the last remnant of his fast-sinking strength, he drew his bayonet and plunged it deep into Percy's side.

He relinquished his grasp of his antagonist, who sunk exhausted on the ground; and putting his hand

to his side, he pressed it feebly, and shook his head with a faint, sickly smile. All this had been but the work of a few seconds—but oh, what seconds!

The enemy had now been forced back, our soldiers were coming up in numbers, and a loud cheer of triumph rang through the deserted battery.

In a moment I was beside Percy, who, pale and feeble, leant against a fragment of masonry. Colonel Grant, too, supported in the arms of two soldiers, approached the place where he stood, and said in a voice of anxious kindness, "Lascelles, my dear fellow, I fear you are wounded; but I hope not seriously?" But for your gallant conduct it would have been all over with me; I shall make it my first duty to report your noble behaviour to the commander-in-chief, and your promotion is certain."

"Thank you for your good intentions, colonel," replied Lascelles, faintly; "you have ever been my warm friend, and I am proud to have been at all instrumental in preserving so valuable a life. But I shall not live to be promoted; that bayonet has gone home—I feel it here," and he again pressed his hand heavily on his side, from which the life-blood was now slowly welling; then looking at me kindly as I gazed sorrowfully on his pale features, he whispered, "I am glad you are here, Charley; I shall have you with me at the last."

"Percy," I replied, in a choking voice, "don't say that; I can't bear it. It may not be so serious as you think; let me try to stanch the blood."

His weakness now became more apparent, and we laid him down very gently, while I knelt and supported his head against my shoulder, my eyes dim with tears, for I could not raise my right arm to brush them

away. He saw that it was helpless, and said anxiously, "Charley, is your arm broken?"

"I think so," I replied; "but never mind that."

"Poor boy," he said, so tenderly, "it must hurt you very much. I observed you, Charley, and you did very well." Then addressing Colonel Grant, who still watched him sadly, he said, "Colonel, you will take an interest in him for my sake as well as his own?—you will be his friend?"

"I will indeed, Captain Lascelles," replied the colonel, huskily; "indeed, Mr. Nugent, your conduct at the breach met with my warmest approbation, and certainly shall be most honourably mentioned. Remain with Captain Lascelles; I deeply regret that I must leave you, but my duty is elsewhere."

He grasped Percy's languid hand, and gazed at him wistfully. "Good-bye, colonel," said Lascelles; "I shall never fight under you any more—all success to the old 144th. Remember me to everybody, and give my kind farewell to your wife. I hope you will soon meet in brighter days."

The effort of speaking had exhausted him, and he feebly closed his eyes for a few seconds.

"God bless you, my dear fellow," said Colonel Grant, with much emotion, "God bless you!"

There was no fighting going on in our immediate vicinity; the fury of the battle was now in another direction Many wounded men lay groaning around us, and some soldiers were endeavouring to render them assistance.

Two were supporting Lascelles, while I knelt beside him anxiously striving to check the fatal bleeding which was slowly but surely exhausting his strength.

"Charley," he said, in a low tone, "do you remem-

ber what I told you last night? It was a true warning; I knew it would be; but I have no regret in dying, except leaving you. It is the fate of all others I have courted—a soldier's death in action. Think on this, my dear boy, when you miss me, for you will do that sometimes."

"Oh, Percy! I cannot part with you," I exclaimed, in agony. "What shall I do without you?—my best, my only friend!"

"I wish I had been a better one," he replied. "Ah, Charley! I *am* sorry to leave you. I have liked you well, my boy; more than even you thought. Many a pleasant hour you have given me, that but for you would have been very dreary."

I leant over him, and clasped his feeble hand in mine. I saw that he was sinking fast; something in his eyes told me that his very minutes now were numbered; and oh, the cold weight that lay on my heart, as I felt that the hour of our separation was now at hand, for death was written in every ghastly lineament, and the faint pressure of his hand became yet more and more relaxed.

A soldier near handed me a flask containing brandy, and I held it to his lips for a moment, but he could not swallow any, and shook his head with a mournful smile.

"Percy," I said, endeavouring to speak calmly, "is there nothing I can do for you? Speak to me, Percy."

"Nothing, my dear boy, but what I told you; and remember, I have wished to die; let that console you for my loss. Farewell, dear Charley; think of me sometimes, and remember that you have been very

dear to me; my last wish is for your happiness. Farewell, my dear, dear boy—farewell."

He fixed his eyes on me with a long, wistful gaze, and a gentle smile of pitying love lighted up his pale features. The smile died slowly away into an expression of indescribable calm; a faint tremulous shiver passed over his languid frame, one last feeble pressure of my hand, and I bowed down my head with unutterable anguish, for now I felt that I was indeed alone. In that last momentary struggle the spirit of Percy Lascelles had passed away!

Reader, my story is finished. Charley Nugent is no longer a subaltern.

Before the close of the war I had obtained my company, and I was also appointed to a brevet majority, owing to the favourable manner in which my name was mentioned in the report of the Commander-in-Chief.

The Crimean medal glitters on my breast, the Cross of the Legion of Honour was also presented to me by that powerful sovereign with whom it was our pride to be allied; and each and all of those honours found me no ungrateful recipient; but most of all I prize that simple bronze cross bestowed on me by the fair and gracious lady, whose name is as a watchword to Britain's marshalled hosts.

When the fair hand of England's Queen clasped that proud token of her approval on my breast, I felt that no danger so terrible, no adventure so hopeless, but that a British soldier would cheerfully encounter it when such a reward as this awaited him. Years have rolled on since the events occurred that are recorded in these pages.

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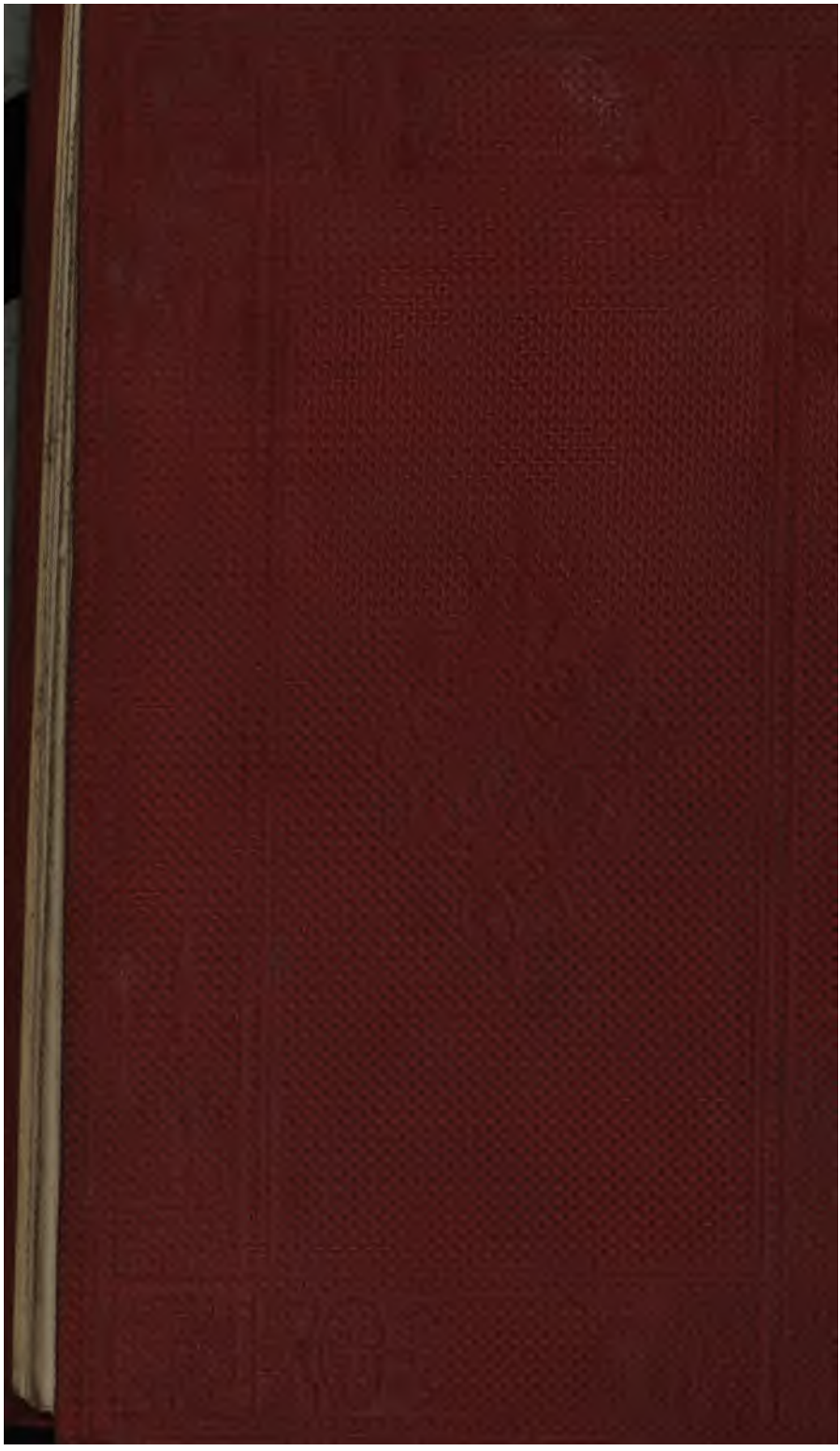
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